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PHILOSOPHICAL INCURSIONS
INTO
ENGLISH LITERATURE

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INTO
ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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P R E F A C E

LIKE many other elderly people I spent a large part of the late turbulent war years in refreshing my acquaintance with the classics of English literature.

That is not an excuse for writing this book. It is only an account of the way in which the book came into existence.

I have had some practice in writing and in lecturing on philosophy. In matters of literature I am only an amateur. It is unlikely that my defects in the latter are compensated by my professional experience in the former. All the same, if it be clearly understood at the outset that I am the last person in the world to disparage the enormous importance of literary training in such a volume as this, I may possibly be able to say something of interest in it, and occasionally something of value, to several types of readers. But for the encouragement of another and very different type of poacher, the late W. MacNeile Dixon, I should not have attempted publication.

I have to thank the editors of *Philosophy* and of *The Review of English Studies* for permission to reprint essays I and III of the present book. All the rest have been unpublished hitherto.

JOHN LAIRD

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2 May 1946

Chapter I

SHAKESPEARE ON THE WARS OF ENGLAND

IN these grim and heavy years, despite all their inroads upon leisure, it seems likely that Shakespeare is read more widely and loved more deeply in this country than for many generations past, and since foreign communiqués as well as British ministers of the crown have been known to quote from him, it may be conjectured that the world as well as these islands is sensible of a part of the debt that humanity owes him. Be that as it may, there is perennial refreshment in the blended wit and wisdom and fancy of his immortal pages, and a timely privilege for his countrymen in the fact that his histories dealt with anguished, bitter years. To be sure, we read him more for his timelessness than for his timeliness, and allow, with the speaker in *King John*, that 'He is but a bastard to the times,' That doth not smack of observation'. Such observation is just philosophy; but even philosophy reacts to the stimulus of its immediate environment.

Therefore, although I have to show some effrontery in attempting this essay, I have less occasion for apology than might appear on the surface. I admit that I know nothing of stagecraft and am not a great playgoer; that I have the sketchiest knowledge of British history and no knowledge at all of Shakespeare's sources; that my savour for literature, such as it is, is little more than a loutish affection for words. These are grave defects, but there is nothing very presumptuous in attempting to set down some of the crude impressions of a mere reader of Shakespeare who loves his author. There are many in like case, and it would be sad if they had all to be dumb. No doubt there is an inevitable and a painful chasm between the littleness of the commentator and the amplitude of the master. That, however, would apply to most

commentators. For the rest of it, I should say that in things which have a universal appeal, a layman has a certain right to be vocal, although not as good a right as a specialist has.

So, rashly but humbly, I intend to proceed to my theme, but with one very significant restriction. In what is to follow I shall confine myself entirely to Shakespeare's histories of the kings of England, beginning with *King John* and ending with *Henry VIII*.¹ What I say may need correction from passages in the other plays that I do not now recall. That is another defect. Still, this restricted field is rather wide and is also rather intricate.

It was a sombre scene when 'Heaven itself did frown upon the land'. *King John*, the first of these histories, is a play that is relatively self-contained. It is the story of perfidy faintly redeemed by patriotism. Indeed, it is hard to tell whether John, or Philip of France, or Pandulph the Pope's legate was the most perfidious, although John, I dare say, won by a few necks. *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth* which ends the series, and is also, pretty nearly, self-contained, is, in its way, a tortuous but magnificent introduction to great Queen Bess's christening; but it is Wolsey's fall 'like Lucifer' and Queen Katharine's beautiful patient fortitude that stick in the mind, bringing tears that are not tears of joy.

The other eight plays, *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, the three parts of *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*, form a single connected dreadful story—dreadful despite their gleams of chivalry or glory and despite the art that gave us Falstaff, and Bardolph, and Justice Shallow, and Fluellen. When Richard banished Bolingbroke and confiscated the revenues of Lancaster (since John of Gaunt could not survive the sentence on his son), the act, so far from being statesmanlike, brought generations of disaster. Bolingbroke's return in arms, nominally to recover his dukedom and his estates, was a plain bid for the crown, and the Bishop of Carlisle, one of the few honest churchmen in these pages, foretold the meaning of the 'woeful pageant' of Boling-

¹ I am not referring to the order in which the plays were written.

broke's coronation. 'The woe's to come; the children yet unborn Shall feel this day as sharp to them as thorn.' The house of Lancaster had tried to do what all the waters in the rough rude sea could not do; it had tried to wash the balm from an anointed king. The balm stung; and the fault had to be expiated, not indeed by an inexorable fate or pseudo-philosophy of history called the 'logic of events', but in a groping, darkened development in the troubled minds of men.

Bolingbroke knew it. He turned his eyes towards a Crusade, and when Hotspur's rebellion stopped that project, he had good hopes that his son Harry Monmouth, despite his brawling tap-room ways, would reap in honour what had been so dishonourably sown. On his deathbed Bolingbroke said:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown; and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head.
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation,
For all the soil of the achievement goes
With me into the earth.

It almost seemed so. Harry Monmouth re-interred Richard's bones and gave lavishly to the poor 'to pardon blood'. On the eve of Agincourt he prayed:

Not to-day, O Lord,
O, not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown;

and if any victory could give the answer to the ordeal by battle Agincourt seemed to do so. The crowns of France and of England were to be united in Henry's son, should he have one, by a princess of France. But the reign of that son, Henry VI, gave the lie to all these hopes. Joan of Arc intervened. Henry's minority was long, his manhood all too long, more futile than saintly, though something saintly too. France was lost, England distracted, the nobles in arms, the roses, red and white, were thorny briars that

rent the land. There was neither rest nor hope for England till Richard III (according to Shakespeare a mere monster of militant evil) fell on Bosworth field.

That is the general picture, and war is a major theme in all the histories except two, one of which, the second part of *Henry IV*, is notable, nevertheless, for its recruiting scenes, the other being *Henry VIII*. What were Shakespeare's observations about these wars?

I have not noticed much that resembled a general philosophy of war in the histories. Perhaps it would be an anachronism to expect one even from Shakespeare, at any rate from the lips of the princes, barons, politicians, and murderers who do so much of the speaking. It seems to be assumed throughout that men will be men, and so will fight in organized bodies if they are organized at all. There is talk, it is true, of the Crusades,¹ but there is no indication that wars would cease if the cross annihilated the crescent and all other heathen emblems.

That being understood we are chiefly concerned with Shakespeare's attitude to wars.

Here the first and the most noticeable point is that it is the horror of war, not its pomp and glory if it has any, that was overwhelmingly present to Shakespeare's mind. Philip the Bastard's tirade in *King John*—

O, now doth death line his dead chaps with steel;) ✓
 The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs;
 And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men,
 In undetermined differences of kings,

is only more eloquent than the sentiments of the others. For all the actors, war had the brand of Cain. Indeed, it should be sufficient to remark upon the attitude of Shakespeare's greatest hero, King Henry V. That monarch was not only punctilious to obtain the blessing of the church upon his cause, but also humane. 'We give express charge' he said after hearing about the malmsey-

¹ It was not till 1683 that John Sobieski destroyed the Ottoman menace to Europe at Vienna.

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nosed Bardolph's offences, 'that in our marches through the country, there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language; for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner.' Few were more sensible than he of the blessings of peace, 'dear nurse of arts, plenties and joyful births'. He deplored the desolation of France:

Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart
Unpruned dies; her hedges even-pleach'd
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair,
Put forth disorder'd twigs; the fallow leas
The darnel, hemlock and rank fumitory
Doth root upon.

Even so our houses and ourselves and children
Have lost, or do not learn for want of time
The sciences that should become our country:
But grow like savages—as soldiers will
That nothing do but meditate on blood—
To swearing and stern looks, defused attire
And every thing that seems unnatural.

Yet it would be hard to exceed the detailed matter-of-fact savagery of Henry V's threats to the citizens of Harfleur:

The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.
What is it, then, to me, if impious war
Array'd in flames like to the prince of fiends,
Do with his smirched complexion, all fell feats
Enlik'd to waste and desolation?

...in a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;,
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverent heads dash'd to the walls,

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Your naked infants spitted upon pikes
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.

Indeed, in Shakespeare's histories even the entry into war was, almost always, a joyless business. 'Our doctors say this is no month to bleed.' That is the usual story. Certainly there were adventurous spirits whose courage mounted with occasion. There was jollity in the archdeacon's house at Bangor when Hotspur, Mortimer, Glendower, and their ladies were almost ready for the great enterprise. Of general, joyful alacrity, however, there was very little, the main exception, as usual, being Henry V's campaign. Then expectation sat in the air:

Now all the youth of England are on fire
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man.

It being allowed, then, that war is a dreadful evil, the question arises whether war is more abhorrent in some circumstances than in others. To that question the answer of Shakespeare's histories appears to be that civil war is the worst of all, that there is something unnatural in the presence of a foreign foe in England, and that war within Christendom is less defensible than a Crusade.

The first point needs no proof. All the histories are massive evidence for it. 'Blood against blood: self against self.' The thing is summed up in Richmond's (Henry VII's) speech after Bosworth Field:

England hath long been mad, and scarr'd herself;
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood;
The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,
The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire.

The second point is linked with the first in the famous lines that end *King John*. England was and would be unconquerable

'but when it first did help to wound itself'. It is the marrow of John of Gaunt's still more celebrated speech in *Richard II*:

This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house.

The thought, however, is constantly recurring in the histories. There is a mystic sanctity in what Neptune or Nature has done for England, girding her with the ocean. Salisbury says so in *King John*, the gardeners say so in *Richard II*, Warwick says so in *Henry VI*. All these speakers, it is true, were Englishmen, somewhat forgetful of the Welsh and the 'weasel' Scots; but the Duke of Austria says the same in *King John* although without any mysticism. The idea is not that England could not be invaded. On the contrary, small-scale inroads, largely foreign, were quite common in these histories. What is meant is that England is marked out by Nature to be self-sufficient.

The third point is much less prominent but it exists. 'Shall not you and I', said Henry V, wooing his French princess very briskly despite the language barrier, 'Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard? shall we not? what sayest thou, my fair flower-de-luce?' In due time, the boy so compounded said the same:

Ay, marry, uncle; for I always thought
It was both impious and unnatural
That such immanity and bloody strife
Should reign among professors of one faith.

It is usually thought that war is justified when the cause of it is righteous. It is sweetened by patriotism, and burnished by martial honours. We may therefore try to question the histories about these things.

On the point of morality it is hard to distil much good out of all this iniquity, though we may perhaps discern like the royal

saint (who was always lucid in Shakespeare's pages) that 'things ill got have ever bad success'. The plain fact is that all the combatants, whatever their treachery or ambition, called confidently and cheerfully upon God and St George to fortify their arms. There were a few honest men among them, or, at any rate, men who were indifferent honest; but most of the leaders forswore their oaths, double-crossed their friends, were 'crafty-sick' when the crisis was rather too critical, murdered without compunction or (worse) with it, and in all sorts of other ways offended against the simplest moral codes. They committed the oldest sins in the newest kinds of ways. Indeed, it is with a sense of relief that we find some few of them abandoning all moral pretences. When John says sanctimoniously, 'Our strong possession and our right for us', his mother, Elinor, says frankly, 'Your strong possession much more than your right'. Edward of York was equally frank: 'But for a kingdom any oath may be broken; I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year.' Of Richard III's various sayings about conscience the Thrasymachean sentiment:

Conscience is but a word that cowards use
Devised at first to keep the strong in awe

rings the truest. In short it is unprofitable to pursue this aspect of the matter. Henry V, an exception as usual, obtained the blessing of Canterbury and of Ely upon his claim to the throne of France, but his dying father, according to Shakespeare, had given him the sinister charge, 'Therefore, my Harry, Be it thy course to busy giddy minds With foreign quarrels.'

I have already said something about patriotism in connection with Nature's or Neptune's intentions. As Hastings put it: 'Let us be back'd with God and with the seas Which He hath given us for fence impregnable.' But I shall add some further remarks.

Truculent patriotism was common enough. Any one English soldier was held to be the equal of a considerable though finite number of Frenchmen. The English were said to win their fights when they were starving, thus refuting the slander that their

courage was just meat extract. There was plenty of truculent patriotism in Richard III's oration to his soldiers:

Let's whip these stragglers o'er the seas again;
Lash hence these overweening rags of France,
These famished beggars, weary of their lives;
Who, but for dreaming on this fond exploit,
For want of means, poor rats, had hang'd themselves:
If we be conquered, let men conquer us,
And not these bastard Bretons; whom our fathers
Have in their own land beaten, bobb'd and thumped
And in record left them the heirs of shame.

Nor was the truculence necessarily hollow. Cœur de Lion's bastard (*né* Faulconbridge), who spoke the concluding lines in *King John*, was a born adventurer, a 'rash, inconsiderate fiery voluntary' who was so incensed at the negotiated peace that, railing against 'Commodity' (i.e. accommodation, compromise, or appeasement), he concluded, 'Since kings break faith upon commodity, Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee.' Nevertheless, despite all his swagger, Philip the Bastard served his king with unflinching loyalty, and firmly believed that naught would make us rue if England were only true to herself. His royal master was a patriot too, not on the easiest lines since he challenged the Pope:

Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England
Add this much more, that no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions:
But as we, under heaven, are supreme head,
So under Him that great supremacy
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand.

Patriotism of the deeper sort, the twining of the roots of a man's being in the dear and friendly soil of his native land, is everywhere present in the histories. Since it is subtle and seldom vaunts itself it is the more difficult to illustrate. I shall give but one example

here, Mowbray's speech on his banishment by Richard of Bordeaux:

A dearer merit, not so deep a maim
 As to be cast forth in the common air
 Have I deserved at your highness' hands.
 The language I have learned these forty years,
 My native English, now I must forgo:
 And now my tongue's use is to me no more
 Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
 Or like a cunning instrument cased up,
 Or, being open, put into his hands
 That knows no touch to tune the harmony.

I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
 Too far in years to be a pupil now;
 What is thy sentence, then, but speechless death,
 Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?

— Let us turn from patriotism to martial honour. What have the histories to tell us about that?

• Martial honour is pretty different from common morality, but can seldom afford to be so completely dissociated from it as in the high-born ruffians who fill so many of these pages. Even in a military sense York and Somerset could scarcely be excused for their selfish failure to support Talbot, or Northumberland for his prudent sickness when Hotspur put all to the touch. It is impossible to conjoin any sort of honour with the career of Cardinal Beaufort or much with Bolingbroke who, having persuaded Exton to murder Richard of Bordeaux, coolly told the murderer that 'they love not poison that do poison need' and bade him, wageless, 'with Cain go wander thorough shades of night'.

These things are so clear that it is needless to do more than mention them. In the chaos of the times something more primitive than honour took the reins. 'Thy father killed my father: therefore die.'

On the other hand, there are beautiful scenes of chivalry and daring. Hotspur, though not quite disinterested, deserved all his conqueror's praise: 'This earth that bears thee dead, Bears not

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alive so stout a gentleman.' (Hotspur loved honour bravely and) dearly:

Send danger from the east unto the west,
So honour cross it from the north to south,
And let them grapple: O, the blood more stirs
To rouse a lion than to start a hare.

Or again, when his father did not march:

I rather of his absence make this use,
It lends a lustre and more great opinion,
A larger dare to our great enterprise,
Than if the earl were here.

Consider again the scene on the field of Agincourt when York, dying, espies the corpse of Suffolk:

Tarry, dear cousin Suffolk!
My soul shall thine keep company to heaven;
Tarry, sweet soul, for mine, then fly abreast,
As in this glorious and well-foughten field
We kept together in our chivalry.

Or the Talbots, father and son:

Where is my other life, mine own is gone:
O, where's young Talbot? Where is valiant John?
Triumphant death, smear'd with captivity,
Young Talbot's valour makes me smile at thee. ...
O thou whose wounds become hard-favour'd death,
Speak to thy father ere thou yield thy breath;
Brave death by speaking, whether he will or no:
Imagine him a Frenchman and thy foe. ...
Soldiers adieu! I have what I would have
Now my old arms are young John Talbot's grave.

The ruffians notwithstanding, there were many who could say with Mowbray:

Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;
Take honour from me, and my life is done:
Then, dear my liege, mine honour let me try:
In that I live and for that will I die.

Q. & A.

That is one side of the shield, but Shakespeare, with spacious equity, knew that there was another side and that many believed that honour, too, was vanity.

The dying Hotspur himself was almost a witness:

O Harry thou hast robb'd me of my youth;
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me:
They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh:
But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool:
And time that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

The dying Warwick was still more explicit:

Why, what is pomp, rule, reign, but earth and dust?
And, live we how we can, yet die we must.

The living could say these things as well as the dying, and one of the most philosophical of them all was Henry V before Agincourt:

And what have kings, that privates have not too,
Save ceremony, save general ceremony?
And what art thou, thou idle ceremony?
What kind of god art thou, that suffer'st more
Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?
What are thy rents? What are thy comings-in?
O ceremony, show me but thy worth?
What is thy soul of adoration?
Art thou aught else but place, degree and form,
Creating awe and fear in other men?
Wherein thou art less happy, being fear'd
Than they in fearing.
What drink'st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,
But poison'd flattery? O, be sick, great greatness,
And bid thy ceremony give thee cure.
Think'st thou the fiery fever will go out
With titles blown from adulation?
Will it give place to flexure and low bending?
Canst thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,
Command the health of it? No, thou proud dream. ...

This Henry, before he was crowned, had a friend, a gross and

lovable friend, a knight called John Falstaff, which Falstaff was also a philosopher with very clear views about honour and the worth of it. All the world knows them, and yet they insist upon being quoted. Falstaff's shortest statement was: 'I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath; give me life: which if I can save, so: if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.' At greater length he said: 'Well, 'tis no matter; ~~honour pricks me~~ on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set to a leg? No: Or an arm? No: Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism.'

Up to the present I have said very little about the part that women played in these histories. It may now be said that they seldom softened the scenes, though Katharine (of Aragon) certainly did. There was never a gentler, a more queenly queen:

Do what you will, my lords; and pray forgive me,
If I have used myself unmannerly;
You know I am a woman lacking wit
To make a seemly answer to such persons.
Pray do my service to his majesty:
He has my heart yet; and shall have my prayers
While I shall have my life.

And there were other exceptions. Richard of Bordeaux's queen (she was really his child-wife) is gentler in her sorrow than Richard, just as perplexed as he but less sensitive to the clashing blades of dialectic that tore his heart in pieces. The Duchess of York (in *Richard II*) was less of a stoic than her 'sour' husband. The agonies that many of these ladies had to endure excused and indeed required an extravagance of grief. Thus Constance in *King John*:

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I am not mad; this hair I tear is mine;
My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey's wife:
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost;
I am not mad; I would to heaven I were,
For then 'tis like I should forget myself:
O, if I could, what grief should I forget!—
Preach some philosophy to make me mad.

The story of Hotspur, again, was as tender as it was gallant when Kate, his wife, came into it:

Kate. Do you not love me? Do you not indeed?
Well, do not then; for since you love me not
I will not love myself. Do you not love me?
Nay, tell me if you speak in jest or no?

Hotspur. Come, wilt thou see me ride?
And when I am o' horseback, I will swear
I love thee infinitely.

And thus she mourned him:

He was indeed the glass
Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves:
He had no legs that practised not his gait:
And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,
Became the accents of the valiant;
For those that could speak low and tardily
Would turn their own perfection to abuse,
To seem like him; so that in speech, in gait,
In diet, in affections of delight
In military rules, humours of blood,
He was the mark and glass, copy and book,
That fashioned others.

Despite such exceptions the female of the species, in these histories, was just as ambitious as the male. Humphrey of Gloucester's duchess, not Humphrey himself, aimed at the crown. The cynical 'Old Lady' in *Henry VIII* knew precisely what Anne Bullen's disclaimers were worth. Lady Grey was very easily persuaded by Edward IV. The incredible Richard III found his successful wooing of the Lady Anne altogether incredible:

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Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
What, I that killed her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of her hatred by.
Having God, her conscience and these bars against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her!

But even that was less incredible than his later matrimonial venture when in another short and cataclysmal interview he persuaded Edward IV's queen to favour his suit for her daughter and his niece, he having murdered her sons in the Tower, as she and all the world knew.

Indeed, some of the females in these histories were preternaturally tough. I need not speak of Joan of Arc. It was her business to be preternaturally tough. In Shakespeare's rather disappointing study of her she is a shrewd and valiant witch, persuaded of her supernatural origin and, at the final scene, disdainful of her natural father and unscrupulous in her pleas. But consider some of the others. Elinor, John's mother, that 'Ate', was, as we have seen, an entirely implacable exponent of *Realpolitik*. And what, but one thing, can one think of Margaret, Reignier's daughter and queen to King Henry VI? Was she not (as Shakespeare pictures her) fairly described as an 'Amazonian trull'? Certainly she had much to live down in her youth and in her later life she had much to endure. The marriage was Suffolk's doing. He meant it for intrigue in more senses than one. To the grief and dismay of all England, plain as well as gentle, her dowerless marriage meant also the loss of the French provinces, an overdraft in place of credit. She had every right, later, to scorn her feeble husband for disinheriting their son; and, later still, to revile her son's murderers:

O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy!
Canst thou not speak? O traitors, murderers!

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They that stabbed Caesar shed no blood at all,
Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame
If this foul deed were by to equal it.
He was a man; this in respect a child.
And men ne'er spend their fury on a child.
What's worse than murderer that I may name it?

But what a dreadful woman she was, and how foul a murderess herself, conspiring with Suffolk and Cardinal Beaufort for the ruthless murder of Gloucester the Protector, baiting York in a very transport of malevolence before she and Clifford stabbed him, crowning him with a paper crown, taunting him with the death of Rutland his son!

Look, York; I stain'd this napkin with the blood
That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point,
Made issue from the bosom of the boy;
And if thine eyes can water for his death,
I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal.
Alas, poor York, but that I hate thee deadly,
I should lament thy miserable state.
I prithee, grieve, to make me merry, York.
What, hath thy fiery heart so parch'd thine entrails,
That not a tear can fall for Rutland's death?
Why art thou patient, man? Thou shouldst be mad;
And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus.

In comparison with all this it is but a small thing that she should later say to York's widow:

Bear with me. I am hungry for revenge
And now I cloy me with beholding it.

In all this discussion I have been dealing with the great and with their ideas, and have said little or nothing about the war-mind of the common man.

That is in keeping with the tenor of the histories. For nearly all the actors, the common people, were what Archbishop Scroop called them in the play, 'the fond many'. They were feared quite often. Richard of Bordeaux complained of the hold Bolingbroke

had upon their affections. (In actual history Richard had been rather successful in the matter of Wat Tyler, but in the play we hear, not about that, but about the way in which the populace pelted him with mud when Bolingbroke triumphed.) Margaret, 'the Amazonian trull', was afraid of the regard that the common people had for Humphrey of Gloucester. But although the common people were feared they were seldom even flattered. They just didn't count unless, like Jack Cade, they were pawns in a bigger game. Richard III's statement may sound rather different:

The world is grown so bad
That wrens make play where eagles dare not perch.
Since every Jack became a gentleman
There's many a gentle person made a Jack.

But Richard's 'Jacks' were just the relatives of Edward IV's queen, the 'Lady Grey'. The 'Jacks' of Jack Cade's rabblement were very different beings (and Cade professed himself a Plantagenet). Indeed, the Cade episode in *Henry VI* is primarily a rollicking satire on Communism. 'There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it felony to drink small beer; and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass.... There shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery that they may agree like brothers and worship me like God.' There was another side to Cade, it is true:

And you that love the commons, follow me.
Now show yourselves men; 'tis for liberty
We will not leave one lord, one gentleman;
Spare none but go in clouted shoon;
For they are thrifty honest men and such
As would, but that they dare not, take our parts:

but that other side had very little scope in the play.

Occasionally we hear something about the attitude of the common people in a semi-official way when a citizen, a tutor, a

mayor, a scrivener, sentinels, gardeners, pot-boys, and a hired murderer or two play the part of chorus. Hence we learn things that, in general, would not be very hard to guess: that the citizens were profoundly disturbed, 'All may be well; but, if God sort it so, 'Tis more than we deserve or I expect'; that they were not deceived, *teste* the scrivener who engrossed the indictment of Hastings before Hastings was arrested, 'Why who's so gross, That seeth not his palpable device?'; that high taxes were unpopular, 'Tongues spit their duties out, and cold hearts freeze Allegiance in them'; that the loss of France rankled bitterly in every English breast save perhaps in a careerist's like Suffolk's (and a soured sea captain put paid to Suffolk's account). We also learn enough (scarcely too much) of the general misery, one of the more dramatic instances being the scene where Henry VI, sitting lonely on a hill while the battle raged, and fondly supposing that 'humble swains' had only to count the time as he was doing at that moment, mingled his maudlin tears with the hot tears of two pressed men, a father who had unwittingly slain his son, and a son who had unwittingly slain his father.

On the general philosophy of the plain man's duty in war, the most solid contribution comes, as usual, from Henry V. That gallant prince, in the dark night of waiting before zero-hour at Agincourt went about incognito among his soldiery and had a long discussion with three soldiers, Bates, Court and Williams. Bates's attitude was that, be the cause just or no, simple obedience was a subject's duty. 'If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us.' Williams, who had said, 'That's more than we know', when Henry had asserted the justice of the cause, was more argumentative. The king in his opinion had a heavy reckoning for all who died in sin, 'some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left'. To this Henry replied, *imprimis*, that the king was not responsible for 'particular endings' in the affair and did not purpose individual deaths when he purposed indi-

vidual services; *secundo*, that 'if it come to the arbitrament of swords, no king, be his cause never so spotless, can try it out with all unspotted soldiers'; *deinde*, that war was God's beadle, and the king, having committed his obedient soldiers into the beadle's charge, could leave the individual soldier's conscience to a personal arrangement between the soldier and the beadle. The debate ended on a less philosophical note, namely, with a (postponed) challenge from Williams to Henry, since Williams obstinately persisted in his belief that the king would be ransomed if the rest of them had their throats cut, and the disguised Henry resented the imputation.

For the rest we have Shakespeare's vivid incidentals to instruct us, and principally the Falstaff scenes. We have Captain Bardolph and Corporal Nym flaunting their military titles. We have 'Let us to France, like horse-leeches, my boys. To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck' from Ancient Pistol. We learn about the temporary drop in unemployment, 'What! A young knave and begging? Is there not wars? Is there not employment? Doth not the king lack subjects? Do not the rebels need soldiers?' We learn also about Falstaff's recruiting methods (worth £350 to him) in the Hotspur rebellion. 'I press me none but good householders, yeomen's sons; inquire me out contracted bachelors, such as had been asked twice on the banns; such a commodity of warm slaves as had as lieve hear the devil as a drum; such as fear the report of a caliver worse than a struck fowl or a hurt wild duck. I pressed me none but such toasts-and-butter, with hearts in their bellies no bigger than pins' heads, and they have bought out their services.' He repeated the method later with Mouldy, Wart, and the rest, and he almost deserved to get away with it; for what would match the impudent cynicism of his reply to the prince when his rabble were on the march: 'Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better: tush man, mortal men, mortal men.'

If little is said in the histories about the common man, less still is said about the common woman, but I may end this narrative

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with the mention of a *very* common woman, Doll Tearsheet. 'Come, I'll be friends with thee, Jack; thou art going to the wars, and whether I shall ever see thee again or no, there is nobody cares.' We remember her again a little later when her gross, grizzled, jolly, inimitable admirer had 'a dozen captains' calling for him: 'I cannot speak; if my heart be not ready to burst—well, sweet Jack, have a care of thyself.'

Chapter II

ROBINSON CRUSOE'S PHILOSOPHY

THERE is a convention that desert-island stories are boys' books in some special sense. (When the boy is a little too old and a little too critical for the giants and ogres of his fairy-tale years he is promoted to the desert-island class,) there to nourish his imagination upon the ingenuity of the castaway and upon the pirates, savages and mutineers who are usually employed either for putting the solitary upon the island or for getting him off.

Much of this is understandable. The perils of the sea, narrated by a triumphant survivor, the sketchy and spectacular villainies of pirates and cannibals shorn of most of their grossness, are very well suited to a paulo-post-ogreish mentality, and the cunning shifts and ingenious devices of the castaway (who invariably collects enough from the wreck to give him an excellent sporting chance) provide the necessary realistic counterpoise to the spectacular fantasy of the tale. Not very many boys, I suppose, have attempted, like Crusoe, to trim a tree into a plank, but quite a number have bruised, amused and instructed themselves with imitations of his laborious constructions with inadequate tools.

I do not know what proportion of boys, nowadays, have more than a sleepily nodding out-of-school acquaintance with *Robinson Crusoe*, Part I, but I suspect, on the evidence of several casual inquiries, that many of their fathers read the book and re-read it. In my youth and in theirs we were led to it very early. My own unabridged copy of both parts, I find, was given me when I was eight by an octogenarian grand-aunt who, having been something of a terror to youth in her time, had mellowed appreciably as her hold on life diminished. I doubt, however, whether she knew in any detail what she was giving me, that is to say, a

thoroughly philosophical romance,¹ and I am quite sure that the philosophy did not penetrate.

For philosophy it is—a moral tale, and a *tractatus theologico-politicus* embroidered by a prince of story-tellers. Part of the moral, it is true, is a demonstration of the efficiency of 'reason', of the way in which *homo sapiens* succeeds as a 'natural mechanic' when he is put to it. The principal part of the moral, however, judged both by construction and by the proportionate length of the discussions, is ethico-theological *pur sang*. Crusoe described what happened to his conscience with the same minute accuracy as he described his construction of a periagua or the dangerous currents to the east of his island. Gabriel Betteredge, the butler in Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone*, had every encouragement for regarding the book as a sort of second Bible and as a very useful adjunct to the first. I do not say that the philosophy of the book is very profound, but it is careful and serious and characteristic of the liberal thought of its age.

Crusoe's 'original sin', he said, was disobedience to his father, but the sin was more than a simple breach of the fifth commandment. The aggravating circumstance, and, it would seem, the worst part of the sin, was that Crusoe's father, né Kreutzmann of Bremen, was a wise man whose paternal injunctions were justified because his philosophy of life was sound. His was a 'just standard of true felicity', for he knew that the middle station of life, or, rather, the 'upper station of low life', was the best. Since his son Robinson had a comfortable berth waiting for him, his hare-

¹ In this essay I am arguing solely from the internal evidence of *Robinson Crusoe*, Parts I and II, and not from the highly moralistic *Serious Reflections* which Defoe, pursuing the book's success, added later. There Defoe's contention was that *Robinson Crusoe*, although an allegory, was also historical and narrated genuine incidents in his own career. On this it would not be difficult to be considerably more sceptical than, say, Minto was in his *Defoe*, chap. ix.

As evidence of Defoe's capacity for philosophizing on the basis of intellectual experiment grounded upon imaginative isolation, his *The Dumb Philosopher*, published in 1719, the same year as *Robinson Crusoe*, Part I, is sometimes mentioned.

brained fancies for the sea, for adventure, for seeing the world were preposterous follies. Robinson was no wiser than an elder brother who had gone to the wars in Flanders and had got himself killed. One such warning in the family should have been enough.

And Crusoe was not simply warned by his prudent father. He had further admonitions from a higher source. Providence 'resolved to leave him entirely without excuse' on his very first voyage. Beginning with the gentle hint of land-lubberly sea-sickness, the Great Disposer ordained such a prodigious tempest in Yarmouth Roads that the ship founded, and the rescue of Crusoe and of the crew was a letter-day marvel. But Crusoe was unteachable. He was not ashamed to sin but he was ashamed to repent, and so tried to make his fortune quickly in a voyage to the Guinea Coast. At this point Providence forbore from further admonitions unless 'a violent calenture' was to be considered in that light. Crusoe was in good company, met with honest dealing, gained a considerable if unarticled acquaintance with seamanship and returned with £300 in his pocket.

His next adventure might be called mixed admonitory. He was captured by a 'Turkish rover of Sallee' and was a slave for two years. But he managed to escape very cleverly, had a loyal helper in the slave-boy Xury, met friendly negroes when he had to land on the African coast, contrived to collect some marketable articles, and, when he was rescued by a Portuguese ship bound for the Brasils, found its captain so very generous that he landed in the Brasils with money in his pocket. Moreover, his remaining small capital being honestly remitted from London, he was able, very rapidly, to become a flourishing planter in the Brasils with excellent commercial prospects. His 'rambling' get-rich-quick humour however, still pursued him. He must attempt negro-running without a government permit. Hence disaster in the Caribbean and his forlorn and watery landfall upon his deserted island, the only survivor of the entire ship's company. The hour of admonition was over. The hour of punishment had arrived. He had fallen, most uncomfortably, into the terrible pit he had digged for himself.

It would seem that this clear if remarkable piece of moral analysis is meant to be accepted with pious assurance and is not a roundabout way of tilting at copy-book morality. Crusoe's psychology is thoroughly rationalistic with the sole exception of a Socratic (*daimon*) in moments of crisis proceeding from some friendly but supernatural agent, 'whether supreme, or inferior and subordinate is not the question'. Some people, he knows, are sometimes smitten with ecstasy, as Friday was when his father was rescued or as some of the French people were whom Crusoe, in Part II, rescued from a burning ship off the Banks of Newfoundland. He notes such things as a curiosity of human nature, and leaves it at that. (Certainly he knew very well that men have headstrong passions and are often subject to 'vapouring', but he seems to have believed consistently that it was reason's business to control all these passions, and that, without such control, felicity was not to be had.) Consequently he seems invariably to have inferred that his own vagabond impulses were things to be subdued. Oddly enough he never seems to have asked himself whether, in a man of his wandering temperament, felicity could ever be achieved along the middle path of prudential security. On the other hand, when, after the lessons of the island, he stood *in loco parentis* to a pair of nephews, he sent the adventurous one to sea; and he himself was over seventy when, having had 'a life of infinite variety', he appreciated the blessing of ending his days in peace.

Crusoe, except for disobedience to his parents, was a most respectable young man with a genius for finding honest friends. Consequently his later self-reproach for his 'uncommon wickedness' may seem exaggerated, and savagely punished by so many years of exile from his kind. Even if, as appears, his life had been 'wicked and profane to the last degree' because it had been habitually godless, he was receiving uncommon punishment for a common fault. All the same he accepted the verdict, though not at once. According to his 'Journal' he 'had not the least religious thought' when he was sufficiently recovered to take stock of his (fertile) 'Island of Despair', his 'horrible desolate island'. He

was moralist enough to make a table of the good and evil in his lot, and to speculate about a providential design in the storm which shifted the ship so that he could come at her; but that was all—no prayers, no contrition. A short time afterwards he scented a miracle when barley and rice sprouted near his cave, but relapsed into his habitual godlessness when he found a natural explanation, and saw that the thing was due to the straggling seed he had shaken out unwittingly from rat-eaten trash in an old sack. /

' As so often happens it was illness of body which led to the salvation of his soul. In an ague, treated rather drastically with tobacco steeped in rum, Crusoe became sensible of his past wickedness. He came to see that deliverance from sin was a greater thing than deliverance from affliction, and with a Bible to support him, very encouraging when opened at random, he argued himself into a condition of fatalistic Christian resignation in a shortish set of sylogisms. He spent the first anniversary of his shipwreck in fasting, and by the end of his second year on the island had to summon his native good sense to prevent him from overpersuading himself that his condition was ideal. 'How canst thou be such a hypocrite (said I, even audibly) to pretend to be thankful for a condition which, however thou mayest endeavour to be contented with, thou wouldest rather pray heartily to be delivered from? So I stopped there.'

When in the eleventh year of his stay upon the island Crusoe discovered the print of a man's naked foot upon the sand and decided, by measurement, that it was not his own and, by conjecture, that the Devil was too subtle to have made it, his religious and moral ideas underwent a certain readjustment. At first his fears expelled his religion. As they abated, he perceived that a sedate frame of mind is friendlier to religion than emotional turmoil. All the same his conscience became active enough for sustained application to casuistry and to moral philosophy. Should he not exterminate the cannibal parties which, as he now knew, sporadically polluted his island? Prudence came last in these cogitations. He thought of himself as a scourge of evil; but

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pure morality restrained him, deciding (a) that if Providence had not seen fit to instruct these cannibals in better ways it was not for Robinson Crusoe to interfere, (b) that he would be no better than a bloody and unnatural Spaniard if he massacred these savages when, having no thought of his existence, they intended him no hurt. So he improved the concealment of his domains and was even more attentive than before to his mysterious private *daimon*.

In Crusoe's twenty-fourth year upon his island things began to happen. The wreck of the Spanish ship, although there seemed to be no survivors, showed that a return to Europe was not utterly impossible, and Crusoe 'set himself upon the scout' to catch a savage, make another Xury of him, construct a sizable canoe and put to sea in it. Friday's capture duly followed, luck helping sound planning; and Friday's early education sharpened his master's theology.

Crusoe found that the cardinal propositions of natural theology were readily accepted by a savage's natural reason. That the world must have had a Maker who retained his sovereign omnipotence was something (it seemed) that neither the crudest nor the subtlest wit could boggle at. Friday, who began rather well by saying that the World-maker 'lived beyond all', was easily persuaded that his accustomed interpretation of this phrase, namely, that the World-maker lived just beyond the skyline, was grossly inferior to Crusoe's enlightened knowledge that the Creator lived above the sun, a location which showed the absurdity of the priestly tricks that had deceived Friday when the medicine men of his tribe demanded a fee for seeking out God in lonely and secret places in the mountains. On the other hand, Friday made sad work of the place of the Devil in the scheme of things. The poor savage could not understand how God, being omnipotent, did not liquidate the Devil out of hand, a slow but eventual triumph appearing to him to be a sad waste of time. So Crusoe had to face the problem of the relations between natural and revealed theology, including in the latter Christ's mission and methods of salvation.

Crusoe found, however, that Friday, once he had grasped the point, gave ready and docile assent to basic but revealed Christianity. 'Niceties in doctrines' and 'schemes of church government' were 'perfectly useless' to both. Natural religion plus (all?) the Bible were quite enough for any man.

H²ere in substance ends the moral and theological lessons of the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, 'the first part of a life of fortune and adventure, a life of Providence's chequer-work which the world will seldom be able to show the like of'. The political moral of the story is chiefly in Part II, when Crusoe returned to his island, bent on making it, though in a brief visit, at least a port of call to Utopia. There are, however, sundry pieces of political wisdom in Part I, especially towards its close, when the underpopulated island tended to become overpopulated.

At quite an early stage of his long solitary stay on his island Crusoe included among his reflections the 'pleasing' thought that he was literally the monarch of all he surveyed. Certainly he had no fear of sedition from his goats, his dog, his parrot, and his cats. He may have been aware that he had no legal title to monarchy, and indeed (in Part II) played with the idea of obtaining a 'patent' from the British government (without any inquiry into that government's rights in the matter). The rights of the cannibals did not enter his head. European occupation alone counted.

Friday by himself made no political difference. Friday was Crusoe's slave, and had yielded himself without conditions. The same was true of Friday's father when he also was rescued. But the Spanish captain did make a political difference. The reader will remember that the crew of the wrecked Spanish ship had not been lost, but had escaped in their boat to friendly savages of Friday's tribe, that later their captain and Friday's father had been captured in war and taken to Crusoe's island to be eaten, from which distressing predicament Crusoe and Friday had rescued them. The Spanish captain was not a slave though he owed his life to Crusoe, and the political problem could not be

overlooked when the Spanish captain left with Friday's father to fetch the other Spaniards to the island. The Spaniards ought to be very grateful; but political subjection was another matter altogether.

Crusoe had a stronger belief in the Social Contract than in gratitude as an inherent virtue in any man. He therefore insisted upon a covenant confirmed by the most solemn oaths, accepting Crusoe's absolute political sovereignty over the new and enlarged community-to-be. Such was the scheme when the Spanish captain and Friday's father set off on their errand; but in their absence a much more serious political problem developed. This was the problem of the English ship and its mutineers.

Crusoe rescued the English captain who covenanted, in his turn, to accept Crusoe's complete authority on the island. Thereafter the political problem was held to be relatively simple in principle. The captain owed his executive authority to the laws of England, and had covenanted with 'Governor' Robinson Crusoe. The practical difficulties were not insurmountable. Crusoe kept as much in the background as he could. As 'governor' his goat-skins and immense moustachios were not impressive, and the clothes which the English captain later gave him were far too clearly just the captain's gift. For the rest, the problem was to destroy the incorrigible among the mutineers, secure the assistance of the corrigible and pinion, maroon or 'whip and pickle' those who were betwixt and between. This was duly done, and Crusoe and Friday were able to sail for civilization. But they left a very pretty political pothole behind them. When the Spanish captain returned with Friday's father and the rest of the Spaniards he found not Crusoe but Crusoe's instructions and apologies, together with three near-incorrigible rascals of Englishmen, and two other Englishmen of slightly better character who had had to be put in irons on the ship but had made their escape.

Robinson Crusoe left his 'accursed island' on 19 December 1686. He returned to it on 10 April 1695, not to reside in it, but to land stores and settlers sufficient to give it its chance to become

a flourishing community. In this, duty was not his motive—neither duty to the Spaniards whom he had left in the lurch, with aggravated precariousness, nor regard for Friday's filial sentiments. Crusoe's motive was just his vagabond itch. An interesting piece of sentimental benevolence, with natural pride thrown in, was quite supernumerary. But he could afford it, since his plantations in the Brasils, through the almost incredible honesty of his partners and their government, had accumulated some £50,000 for him. When his wife died at a dramatically convenient moment, Crusoe left his farm in Bedfordshire, and with his sailor nephew for captain was again on the high seas.

What had happened in these eight years, three months and twenty-two days was roughly as follows: When the Spaniards came, only three weeks after their captain and Friday's father had sailed to fetch them, there had to be three separate groups on the island: the Spaniards, honourable to a man and with Friday's father as their companion in virtue, the two less rascally Englishmen who were passably industrious, and the three rascally Englishmen who were incorrigible idlers and loaded with mischief. The rascal English harassed the relatively industrious English and all their works, thus proving that a small mischievous element ruins political security. External danger, however, did something to pull the community together. Two savage armies came across to have a battle. Since the combatants did not suspect the presence of any Europeans the result was pretty nearly pure gain for the Europeans. They captured and enslaved a few fugitives from the fight, and these, having been thoroughly scared, made some sort of temporary pact of security with one another.

The rogues, however, remained knavish, and since the virtuous Spaniards would not kill them—for these rogues were English and an Englishman had rescued the Spaniards—complete disaster faced the entire colony. The solution came from the rogues. They would risk a sea-voyage in a canoe if they were allowed to stock it with a minimum supply of food and ammunition.

This seemed a good riddance; but back the rogues came with three native slaves, five native women, and some very chastening experiences. The colony seemed now to have better prospects. The three male slaves would do the work that the idle Englishmen would never do. There were five English beds for the five native women, the noble Spaniards preferring celibacy to a man. Moreover, each Englishman stuck loyally to his chosen woman, and the idler the Englishman, the more industrious the mate he chose. So the diligent hand began to make rich, despite handicaps, especially in the matter of roomy basket-work dwellings for the growing half-breeds and their parents.

Sooner or later, however, the savages were bound to learn that there was a European colony. When the invasion in force came, the rascal English showed that they were very pretty fighters, and Will Atkins, the worst of them, proved himself an astute, brave and competent lieutenant to the Spanish captain (who combined all the virtues but took Atkins's advice about tactics). So the colony won its battle and made itself safe from external dangers. Some thirty-seven savages were confined in a reservation. The rest were destroyed.

Consequently, when Crusoe arrived, the colony had almost surmounted the early political difficulties of such a community. Indeed, all its members assured Crusoe 'that they would never have any interest separate from one another'; and they were so delighted with the provision he had made for their advantage that they unanimously engaged not to leave his island without his consent. Thereupon he parcelled out the land, and distributed the stores he had brought upon the communist principle of need, with a reserve to be distributed on the same principle. If a hatchet was broken it would be replaced. As in Plato's 'first city', however, economic communism was not enough. There had also to be something more spiritual.

Here Defoe spoke in a parable very plain to read. Among the very few of the French who elected to remain with Crusoe after he had rescued their burning ship off Newfoundland was a young

went to the root of the whole matter. According to him 'the good' were those whom human beings praised for certain human qualities, and, in the end, for their benevolence, love and charity. Benevolence, love and charity were but human affections. They were wholly inapplicable to God, the great Contriver whose design was for the action not for the actors.

Consequently the entire so-called problem of evil had to be restated. It was derivative, not fundamental, and derivative in the following way: God was beneficent to man; but what does that mean? Beneficence in the case of mankind means, quite simply and quite finally, the production of a favourable balance of human happiness. In that sense God was beneficent, though not benevolent, because in making man He made a happiness-seeker who was capable of obtaining much happiness and relatively little pain if he chose the appropriate means. And man could choose those means. That was the whole of the matter.

So Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke. Not so Alexander Pope—at any rate not consistently so.

Chapter IV

CONCERNING DR ISAAC WATTS

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS after Mungo Park, the Scottish surgeon-explorer, had perished on the upper Niger, all that another explorer could find as relics of Park were the *Psalms* and the *Hymns* of Isaac Watts superstitiously retained as talismans by the tribe which had done him to death.

Park met his end about 1806, a hundred years after the publication of Watts's *Horae Lyricae*, followed in the next year by the *Hymns* and in 1719 by *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. Even after a century Watts's sacred songs were among the most likely choices for the minute travelling library of an explorer who might need spiritual refreshment in the dangerous solitude of his adventurous business. They were among the topmost products of the greatest English century of hymn-writing, the evangelistic counterpoise to the sedate urbanity of the Age of Reason. Watts himself died in 1748, when his tiny exhausted frame, overdriven in its youth and hard though carefully driven in its prolonged maturity, at last succumbed in the seventy-sixth year of his age. His works and their abundant influence followed him.

Many of Watts's hymns are still very well known, and the greatest of them, 'Our God, our help in ages past' (sometimes rendered 'O God, our help'), may be the greatest in our language. Hence his name deserves to be held in grateful remembrance. Even in an unchurchly age like the present, the hymn is the form of verse most familiar to the public, and does more than any other form to shape the public taste. Hymn-writers are educators in letters. They may raise the standard of public appreciation. If they debase it, they are like coin-clippers and drive good verses out. Watts was and meant to be a good educator in this sense, and his influence was the greater not only

because he had an immense following among all the dissenters and among many who were not dissenters, but also because so many of his hymns were fitted to solemn occasions and to deep emotions where vulgarity of expression was an offence to the common man, as well as to the more sophisticated.

Watts in his prefaces gave a very clear account of his aims. He did not believe in art for art's sake, but he did believe in art for the soul's sake. 'It has been a long complaint of the virtuous and refined world', he said, 'that poesy whose original is divine should be enslaved to vice and profaneness, that an art inspired from heaven should have so far lost the memory of its birth-place as to be engaged in the interests of hell.'¹ Hence 'some weaker Christians' imagined 'that poetry and vice are naturally akin, or at least that verse is fit only to recommend trifles and entertain our looser hours'.² On the contrary, a sacred subject should give 'wonderful aids to the muse, and the heavenly theme would so relieve a dull hour and a languishing genius that when the muse nods the sense would burn and sparkle upon the reader and keep him feelingly awake. With how much less toil and expense might a Dryden, an Otway, a Congreve or a Dennis furnish out a Christian poem than a modern play?'³ For his *Reliquiae Juveniles* Watts chose the Horatian motto, 'Et jucunda simul et idonea dicere vitae.'

Withal, Watts was a very modest man. 'I make no pretences to the name of a poet or a polite writer', he said, 'in an age wherein so many superior souls shine in their works through this nation.'⁴ He had not Pope's genius or Young's, he said,⁵ still less Milton's, though he owned that he would 'never affect archaisms, exoticisms and a quaint uncouthness of speech in order to become perfectly Miltonian',⁶ even when he attempted blank verse in an effort to avoid what he allowed to be one of his sins, 'the too speedy and regular returns of rhyme'.⁷ (But he did imitate Milton

¹ Preface to *Horae Lyricae*. ² Ibid. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Preface to *Reliquiae Juveniles*. ⁵ Ibid. ⁶ Preface to *Horae Lyricae*. ⁷ Ibid. (For text of all these (1-7) see vol. iv of Watts's *Works*, ed. Rev. G. Burder, London, 6 vols., 1810.)

very closely, for example, in his funeral poem on the death of Thomas Gunston. It began, 'Of blasted hopes and of short withering joys, Sing, heavenly muse', and continued to be visibly Miltonic.) In his own eyes he was just a conscientious craftsman making sacred verses as an avocation, not as his life's work. Nevertheless, the muse was often with him. 'As I have found my thoughts many a time carried away into four or five lines of verse ere I was aware, and sometimes in opposition to my will, so I confess I have now and then indulged it for an hour or two as an innocent and grateful diversion from more severe studies.'¹

Watts's *Horae Lyricae* included, as he said, several hymns which contained metaphors 'too bold to please the weaker Christians' or were, in some other way, 'not suited to the plainest capacity'. In short, they contained his more ambitious pieces both in matter and in manner. There were several Pindaric odes, sacred essays in heroic metre, and elaborate elegies. I shall quote a few passages from a few of these more ambitious pieces:

Forbear, young muse, forbear
The flowery things that poets say,
The little arts of simile,
Are vain and useless here;
Nor shall the burning hills of old
With Sinai be compar'd,
Nor all that lying Greece has told,
Or learned Rome has heard;
Aetna shall be named no more,
Aetna the torch of Sicily.
Not half so high
Her lightnings fly,
Not half so loud her thunders roar
'Cross the Sicanian sea, to fright the Italian shore.

¹ Preface to *Reliquiae Juveniles*. In his *Improvement of the Mind*, chap. xx, Watts answered the question whether a 'bright student' might divert himself by writing poesy' by saying 'Yes, when he cannot possibly help it' and also remarked that a 'lyric ode' was his 'favourite amusement above all others'.

CONCERNING DR ISAAC WATTS

An early poem (1694) begins:

Yet, gracious God,
Yet will I seek thy smiling face;
What tho' a short eclipse his beauties shroud,
And bar the influence of his rays,
'Tis but a morning vapour or a summer cloud:
He is my sun though he refuse to shine,
Tho' for a moment he depart,
I dwell for ever on his heart,
For ever he on mine.
Early before the light arise,
I'll spring a thought away to God;
The passion of my heart and eyes
Shall shout a thousand groans and sighs,
A thousand glances strike the skies,
The floor of his abode.

Somewhat later, in a poem entitled *True Courage*, we have:

He tho' th' Atlantic and the Midland seas
With adverse surges meet, and rise on high
Suspended 'twixt the winds, then rush amain,
Mingled with flames, upon his single head,
And clouds, and stars, and thunder, firm he stands,
Secure of his best life; unhurt, unmoved;
And drops his lower nature made for death.
Then from the lofty castle of his mind,
Sublime looks down, exulting, and surveys
The ruins of creation (souls alone
Are heirs of dying worlds;) a piercing glance
Shoots upwards from between his closing lids,
To reach his birth-place, and without a sigh,
He bids his battered flesh lie gently down
Amongst its native rubbish, whilst the spirit
Breathes and flies upward, an undoubted guest
Of the third heaven, the unruinable sky.

And with a lighter touch in *True Riches*:

There are endless beauties more
Earth hath no resemblance for;
Nothing like them round the pole,
Nothing can describe the soul:

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'Tis a region half unknown,
That has treasures of its own,
More remote from public view
Than the bowels of Peru;
Broader 'tis and brighter far,
Than the golden Indies are;
Ships that trace the wat'ry stage
Cannot coast it in an age;
Harts or horses strong and fleet,
Had they wings to help their feet,
Could not run it half-way o'er
In ten thousand days or more.

There are also some pretty terrible lines about the Gunpowder Plot:

'Come,' said the sons of bloody Rome,
'Let us provide new arms from hell', etc.

and Watts in 1721 added a pathetic note to his poem 'To Her Majesty', written in 1705 in the 'honourable part' of Queen Anne's reign when Blenheim was won and toleration promised. His muse, he said, 'acknowledged the mistake of her former presages' and 'did herself the honour of a voluntary retractation'.

As we have seen Watts's *Hymns* were meant for 'the plainer sort of Christians', not, like *Horae Lyricae*, for 'the politer part of mankind'.¹ Nevertheless, his object was 'to promote the pious entertainment of souls truly serious, even of the meanest capacity and at the same time (if possible) not to give disgust to persons of richer sense and nicer education'. 'I have aimed', he also said, 'at ease of numbers and smoothness of sound, and endeavoured to make the sense plain and obvious. If the verse appears so gentle and flowing as to incur the censure of feebleness, I may honestly affirm that sometimes it has cost me labour to make it so. Some of the beauties of poesy are neglected and some wilfully defaced. I have thrown out the lines that were too sonorous and have given an allay to the verse, lest a more exalted turn of thought or language should darken or disturb the devotion of the weakest souls.'

¹ These and the immediately succeeding quotations are taken from the preface to the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.

Watts did not merely mention these restrictions. He kept to them. And there were others. In the first place he was, as we shall see, a trained logician, and planned his hymns as he planned his sermons on a logical pattern. Secondly, there were special restrictions, duly enumerated. He deplored but had to accept the practice of the times among the dissenters, namely, that the 'clerk' or precentor read or intoned each line separately before the congregation sang it. In consequence it was better for each line to be very nearly self-contained. He used only four metres in order to fit the hymns to the common tunes, and, since he always rhymed, had to accept an extensive recurrence of the same rhymes. (The last is scarcely a sufficient excuse for the high proportion of bad rhymes, often not even eye-rhymes, that Watts allowed himself.)

Altogether there were 365 hymns, one for each day of most years, some being paraphrases rather than original hymns. Few devotional moods and not very many solemn occasions were left without a suitable hymn, and some of the hymns, for instance, 'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord', and 'When I survey the wondrous cross', are still very well known.

There is some doggerel among the *Hymns*; for instance:

'Go preach my gospel', saith the Lord,
'Bid the whole earth my grace receive.
He shall be saved that trusts my word,
He shall be damned that won't believe.'

But there is relatively little doggerel. A fairly characteristic hymn, showing both strength and some weakness, is Hymn 116:

How can I sink with such a prop
As my eternal God
Who bears the earth's huge pillars up
And spreads the heavens abroad?

How can I die while Jesus lives
Who rose and left the dead?
Pardon and grace my soul receives
From mine exalted head.

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All that I am, and all I have
Shall be for ever thine,
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign.

Yet if I might make some reserve
And duty did not call
I love my God with zeal so great
That I should give him all.

Watts's *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* is a richer collection than the *Hymns*. There are 349 psalms, for although Watts omitted some of the psalms he usually gave more than one version of a psalm or of part of one. His 'Short Essay towards the improvement of Psalmody' explained his principles rather fully.

It was one thing, he said, to read passages of Scripture, quite another to sing them aloud. 'When we sing, especially unto God, our chief design is or should be to speak our own hearts and our words to God.' Very few of the Hebrew psalms, without extensive alteration, could express such personal modern devotion. Our heart's desire was to sing about England, not about Judaea. How could a congregation of borrowers and lenders sincerely repudiate usury? How could a modern congregation exult in the downfall of David's personal enemies, and what did they know about hyssop and timbrels? The psalms, in short, should be *evangelic* psalms, not pre-Christian, and, in Britain, should be insular rather than Levantine. There was apostolic precedent for treating the ancient psalms in this spirit. We must extract from them conscious or unconscious vaticinations of Calvary, Christ's resurrection and Satan's overthrow, not Achitophel's. It was hard, Watts confessed, 'to sink every line to the level of a whole congregation and yet to keep it above contempt'. He hoped, however, that 'among so great a number of songs . . . there will be some found that speak the very language and desires and sense of the meanest souls and will be an assistance to their joy and worship'.

Some remarks upon 'Our God'—or 'O God'—'our help in

ages past' may provide suitable comment on Watts's method at its best. (I shall assume a knowledge of the great hymn itself.)

It is a free evangelical paraphrase of the first five verses of the 90th Psalm, in common metre, and was succeeded by two paraphrases in the same metre of the two remaining divisions of the psalm. A version of the entire psalm in long metre preceded it, and three of the verses of the psalm were selected for yet another paraphrase in short metre. Each of these five paraphrases has a distinct title. The motto for the whole was: 'Man mortal and God eternal. A mournful song at a funeral.' The motto for the paraphrase of the first five lines was 'Man frail and God eternal'.

None of the other four paraphrases approaches the level of 'Our God, our help', and even that paraphrase is improved by the omission of three of its nine stanzas. The first or general paraphrase of the psalm, however, contains phrases which are, in some sort, an earnest of the larger treatment in common metre. I shall quote its two introductory stanzas and one other:

Through every age, eternal God
Thou art our rest, our safe abode;
High was thy throne ere heaven was made,
Or earth thy humble footstool laid.

Long hadst thou reigned ere time began
Or dust was fashioned to a man;
And long thy kingdom shall endure
When earth and time shall be no more.

Death like an overflowing stream
Sweeps us away, our life's a dream,
An empty tale; a morning flower
Cut down and withered in an hour.

At various places in his collection of the Psalms Watts made interesting comments, in footnotes, upon his methods and intentions. Incidentally, these indicate some of the dangers of the method. 'In this psalm I have changed David's personal enemies into the spiritual enemies of every Christian'—sin, Satan and so

forth—a method which induced a certain sameness and a certain lack of colour into the collection. He substituted ‘gospel truth and promise’ for ‘statutes, testimony’, etc.—again rather too often. ‘I could not pass over this psalm of the characters of the Jewish saint without inserting some brighter articles that must belong to the Christian.’

There were several adaptations to modern England:

O thou whose mercy bends the skies
To save when humble sinners pray;
All lands to thee shall lift their eyes
And islands of the northern sea.

Psalm 107, in its paraphrase, had the title ‘A psalm for New England or Colonies planted’:

Thus they are blessed; but if they sin
He lets the heathen nations in.

Psalm 75 was adapted either to William of Orange or to George of Hanover:

No vain pretence to royal birth
Shall fix a tyrant on the throne.

There is also ‘Papish Idolatry reprov’d: a Psalm for the 5th of November’ (Psalm 115):

People and priest drive on the solemn trade
And trust the gods that saws and hammers made.

.

Be heaven and earth amazed; ’Tis hard to say
Which is more stupid or their gods or they.

.

O Britain trust the Lord; Thy foes in vain
Attempt thy ruin, and oppose his reign.
Had they prevailed darkness had closed our days,
And death and silence had forbid his praise.
But we are saved and live; let songs arise
And Britain bless the God that built the skies.

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—a concluding sentiment that many Britons might have applauded in 1940 in a way Dr Watts could not have foreseen.

Watts also wrote his *Divine Songs for Children*. As he said: 'There is something so amusing and entertaining in rhyme and metre that will incline children to make this part of their business a diversion', and it is reasonable to suppose that troops of children, as well as their elders, have found infinite diversion in 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite' and in 'How doth the little busy bee'—the latter indeed, except for some of its rhymes, being a perfect example of truth suitably disguised for the entertainment and instruction of young children. Watts, however, was sometimes much less successful. On some occasions his 'composures' (i.e. his compositions) were not suited to children at all, for instance:

Why should our garments, made to hide
Our parents' shame, provoke our pride?
The art of dress did ne'er begin
Till Eve our mother learnt to sin.

—not at all a pretty song for childish trebles, even if some frankness on this matter was due them. Other songs, while very well adapted to children's minds, would be better kept out of such minds:

Whene'er I take my walks abroad,
How many poor I see!
What shall I render to my God
For all his gifts to me?

or the notorious

Lord I ascribe it to thy grace,
And not to chance, as others do,
That I was born of Christian race,
And not a heathen or a Jew.

or the savage

Then let me always watch my lips,
Lest I be struck to death and hell,
Since God a book of reck'ning keeps
For every lie that children tell.

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In addition he wrote a few *Moral Songs* for children, in a tripping metre intended to be 'overflowing with cheerfulness' and beginning with the much-parodied "'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I heard him complain'. This small collection included a variant of 'Let dogs delight', namely,

If we had been ducks we might dabble in mud,
Or dogs we might play till it ended in blood,
So foul and so fierce are their natures:
But Thomas and William and such pretty names,
Should be cleanly and harmless as doves or as lambs,
Those lovely sweet innocent creatures.

—though not in all respects so very cleanly. There may, reasonably, be doubts about the sentiment of:

What though I be low and mean,
I'll engage the rich to love me,
While I'm modest, neat and clean,
And submit when they reprove me.

It was not as a hymn-writer only, or as a pastor, that Watts busied himself over children and the education of youth. In early life he was tutor to Sir John Hartopp's son for five years. After 1712, when an illness had left him unfit, for the remainder of his days, to be the pastor of Mark Lane (even with a colleague), he resided in the household of Sir Thomas Abney, Lord Mayor of London, his friend rather than his patron, and had much to do with the education of Abney's daughters and, later, with a charity school in Cheshunt in which the Abneys were keenly interested. Hence a series of writings upon education, and also certain very successful manuals and text-books applying Watts's principles.

First there were his catechisms. Watts took catechizing to be a genuine Socratic procedure by question and answer. (This it was not, any more than an A.R.P. 'quiz' is to-day. Like such a 'quiz', however, it might yield a certain entertainment to some people.) However that may be, few, nowadays, would dispute Watts's opinion that the first essential for any catechism is the intelli-

gibility of the answers to the catechized. Children should not 'gabble over long sentences of divinity' if these are 'like a mere gibberish to them'. Watts's solution was to compose three catechisms, each reviewing the essentials of Christian doctrine, but at different levels. The third of these, for adolescents, was the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* copiously annotated and explained. The other two, the first for children between four and seven, the second for children over seven, were quite independent compilations. He also produced catechisms of Bible names, and of Sacred History; and he tackled the subject of prayers for young children.

In his *Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth* Watts began pretty early with children, at the age of two or three and 'not without a wish that some wiser and happier pen would give advice or friendly notice to nurses and mothers'. At all stages children were to be encouraged to ask questions and to attempt some sort of independent thinking though duly respectful to their elders. Special pains were to be taken with their speech. They should never have 'a tumult of syllables and clutter upon their lips'. While proper attention had to be paid to their probable station in later life, all children should be instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic. Upper- and middle-class children, of both sexes, should learn some logic and a good deal of mathematics. Upper-class children 'may be instructed' in Latin and Greek, but five or six years of Latin at a Grammar School were quite useless for tradesmen-to-be, and for very many others too. As for French 'few have found the profit balance the labour'—unless they were going to be diplomats or travellers in silk.

'In short it is a thing of far greater value and importance that youth should be perfectly well skilled in reading, writing and speaking their mother tongue in a proper, a polite and graceful manner than in toiling among foreign languages.' In another work, his *Improvement of the Mind*, Watts discussed the preliminary studies required for the learned professions of medicine, law and divinity. Physics, he said, was 'well worth the moderate study of a divine', but too much mathematics might beget

spiritual pride in all the three professions. In the main, however, he thought that linguistic studies should be diminished and scientific studies increased among all who did not have to be professional linguists, and this on grounds of what is ornamental in and delightful to the possessor, not principally for utilitarian reasons.

One of his principal aims—and he did not disguise its difficulty—was to steer a middle course between the undue subjection of children (as in the first or Puritan half of the seventeenth century) and the licence of the early eighteenth when the children (he said) were ‘made familiar companions to their parents almost from the very nursery’. He did not prohibit dancing but he did prohibit masquerades and midnight routs. Of cards and dice he said: ‘I leave it to those who are more skilful in casuistic divinity to prove them absolutely unlawful in the nature of the game.’ But he prohibited even childish stakes among children and, of course, the gaming tables. He would like to see instructive card games introduced, not in the feeble way of printing information on the backs of the children’s playing cards, but in a way in which the information contributed itself to the game. He had little that was good to say of the playhouse and would have ‘a leaf left out here and there from *The Spectator*’. After all, Christians had sometimes to ‘dare to be singular’ and could not always be saying ‘Must we look like old puritans? Must we live like nobody?’

Watts’s text-books were very successful indeed. One, *The Knowledge of the Heavens and Earth made Easy*, deals with geography, navigation and astronomy in a way much less elementary than its modest title suggests. Another, the *Logic, or the Right Use of Reason in the Inquiry after Truth*, ran into many editions and was in use as a university text-book right through the century. A supplement to it called *The Improvement of the Mind* had and deserved comparable influence.

Both books may have owed part of their success to their piety and to the vast respectability of their moral tone combined with considerable worldly wisdom. But they were much better than

merely safe, and although neither is now of much interest to students either of literature or of philosophy each can still be admired for its adherence to a sensible plan, and for the simplicity and ease of the writing.

The *Logic* followed the *Port Royal Logic* fairly closely, with some help from Locke. It was meant to reduce scholastic subtleties, or what were esteemed to be only such, to a minimum, and to put in their place logical rules and principles of genuine utility in general human practice. Consequently Watts made short (probably too short) work of immediate inferences and of the fourth figure of the syllogism, and expatiated pretty fully upon definition, division, fallacies and the 'art of disposing', that is, upon the methodical arrangement of an argument. The book is still a useful quarry for logicians in search of examples which test the pupil's acumen without requiring too much special knowledge. It has also a more copious supply of irregular or extra-syllogistic logical arguments than was at all usual before De Morgan.

The *Improvement* dealt with the ways in which knowledge may be imparted, lectures, debates, book-writing, and Socratic interrogation, as well as with the meditation upon which all genuine study ultimately rests. It also gives hints, sometimes rather sly hints, about the technique of persuasion and of controversy. Watts was a good practical psychologist as well as a skilful and methodical expositor.

Watts's *Brief Scheme of Ontology* supplemented these logical studies by reviewing the major philosophical Common Places or Categories. Its aim was sufficiently explained by its subtitle, 'The Science of Being in general wherein all the various affections or properties, adjuncts and relations of it are contracted into a comprehensive view and ranged in a natural and easy method.' It is strong paddling rather than hard rowing, and was congenial to Watts who for all his modish strictures on the schoolmen was himself of scholastic temperament though shy of technical speech. His style, if it did not rise to great heights, often ascended very pleasant foothills. Take, for instance, this statement: 'Signs are

either seals to signify and confirm what has been done, or pledges to denote and assure what is to be done, or indications and evidences of what is doing.' He did not deviate into literature, but there was literature in his steady walk even over stony ground.

Watts's *Philosophical Essays on various Subjects*, widely read in their day, were more ambitious in their aims although modest and tentative in their execution. In modern psychological slang they were pieces of 'rationalization', that is, were efforts to find reasons for attributing to the human soul properties which Watts, as a Christian theologian, wanted it to have. Such attempts are not unphilosophical simply because the thought is the child of the wish. They are objectionable only if the thought and the wish are muddled together, a truth which Watts perceived quite as clearly as most.

In a philosophical sense, Watts took a rather bold line. He lived in an age in which Cartesianism was waning, and Locke's philosophy, supposed to be the ally of Newtonian physics, was very much in the ascendant all over Europe. For an evangelical Christian with a philosophical turn of mind, the situation was alarming. Descartes's theology had been and remained suspect in the eyes both of Protestant and of Catholic theologians. So was the work of Malebranche, by far the greatest of the Cartesians. Again, Cartesian physics, in the judgment of the learned, had been supplanted by Newtonian physics, a fact which the universities of Europe, including Cambridge, were far too slow to appreciate. On the other hand, Newton, though so pious a Christian, came dangerously near to pantheism in holding that absolute space might, with becoming reverence, be regarded as God's sensorium; and Locke distressed the dissenters as well as the bishops by the extent to which deists and free-thinkers drew upon his famous *Essay on the Human Understanding* to say nothing of his *Reasonableness of Christianity*. Of the last of these, Watts in a note to a rather pedestrian poem in his *Horae Lyricae* said that he had to invoke Charity 'that by her help I may find him out in heaven since his notes on 2 Cor. v. ult. and some other places give me

reason to believe he was no Socinian, though he has darkened the glory of the gospel and debased Christianity in the book which he calls the Reasonableness of it, and in some of his other works'.

Faced with this disturbing situation Watts maintained that the Newtonian physics could not be challenged on physical grounds, although it carried with it absolute space and Godless empty pockets or *vacua*, that a large part of Locke's empiricism had also to be accepted, and that much Cartesian metaphysics had to be abandoned as well as the bulk of its physical hypotheses. Nevertheless, Watts believed that a modified and indeed a rather empirical Cartesianism was as near the truth as philosophy could reach and was also a sound foundation for philosophical Christianity. In his preface to these *Essays* he confessed to eclecticism—but only in the sense that he refused to march behind any one of the biggest banners of the age. He also confessed that 'perhaps' he might have been 'a little pleased with some of these philosophemes in the warmer years of life'.

The most considerable part of his argument dealt with absolute space, the substantiality of the soul, and the mind-body relation with special reference to the immateriality of ideas and the supposed 'place' of spirits. There was also a rather forlorn attempt to defend the resurrectibility of the body on the ground that each body might contain an unchanging part from cradle to coffin (and later), which unchangeable entity might always have kept itself to itself and so be invulnerable to the difficulty that would arise if, let us say, a cannibal devoured a missionary and thereafter himself became a redeemable Christian. In addition, there were sundry comments, more slight than slighting, upon various disputable points in Locke's philosophy.

Regarding absolute space, Watts held that neither Newton's physics nor anything else compelled us to hold, metaphysically, that there was any such thing (or any such no-thing) and denied that bodies must touch if there were nothing between them. Regarding the souls he used empirical arguments to refute Locke's contention that 'every drowsy nod' refuted the idea that 'the soul

thought always', and maintained, with considerable metaphysical acumen, that 'thinking power' may *be* the 'substance' or 'substratum' of the soul just as 'solid extension' (despite Locke) may *be* the substance of 'matter'. This he thought was just common-sense as respects the soul. 'A poor young creature in the lowest rank of life being once asked what she supposed her soul to be, after a little musing replied, "My soul is my think", whereby it is plain she meant her power of thinking.' Therefore (Watts said) the soul is an immaterial substance (and so qualified for natural immortality). Consequently its modes or ideas were equally immaterial, and even if they were sensations could not literally be impressed or moved by anything material. In a sense, therefore, *all* ideas were 'innate', that is, under God, they were never material in their origin. Existing 'nowhere' (but still *existing*) they could not initiate movement in our bodies or in anything else. The truth had to be occasionalism, i.e. the doctrine that 'the Creator has efficaciously decreed or willed from the beginning, and appointed it now as a law of nature, that such a particular machine of matter or flesh, or any of the limbs of it should move when such a particular spirit willed it'; and reciprocally of the supposed action of body upon mind.

I am sorry that, proportionately to the design of this essay, I cannot reasonably give more space to these arguments. I do not suggest that Watts was one of our great philosophers. I do suggest that he was more than merely competent and graceful. I would also submit that the manner and trend of his argument have rather special interest for students of eighteenth-century philosophy in Britain. It is relatively detached from much of the general current of British thought in his age; and Watts was much more interested in Norris, say, than in Berkeley.

Watts discussed the freedom of the will rather fully and with some promising distinctions to start with, but, on the whole, with little instruction to posterity. On the other hand, his *New Essay on Civil Power in Things Sacred* was a model of temperate candour, a quality seldom to be found in discussions on this subject either

in his age or in ours. 'I was not willing', he said, 'to indulge anything to be imposed upon heathen subjects by Christian governors, which may not also be counted reasonable and lawful for a heathen governor to impose upon Christians.' It would not be easy to find a fairer or a more useful touchstone, and Watts employed it with the most painstaking scrupulousness.

In parts of the essay he may appear to be illiberal because he held, with Locke, that the sanctity of an oath was necessary for certain civil engagements. This excluded atheists but not (he said) polytheists or unchristian monotheists. It also excluded Roman Catholics, but only because the Pope claimed the right to absolve from civil oaths. In all other respects the essay was thoroughly liberal, often in surprising ways. One would expect a dissenter to preach toleration: but Watts spent most of his pains in attempting to determine how far a government could legitimately discriminate in favour of its own co-religionists without exceeding its legitimate civil functions, i.e. the use of coercion for promoting public welfare. One would expect a dissenter to argue that because Christianity was true some conformity to it could rightfully be enforced. Not so Dr Isaac Watts. 'Every one who sets up for a persecutor', he said, 'will pretend he is orthodox and has the right on his side, and there is no common supreme court of judicature that can decide this matter.' Since natural religion included all the duties required of good citizens in any state, it was doubtful whether anything more should be taught by the public authority and supported by public funds, still more doubtful whether there should be compulsion to attend any other teaching. Suppose, however, that there were sufficient reasons of state why a Turkish sovereign, say, in a state predominantly Turkish, should compel all the citizens to go to mosque on Fridays and abstain from sports on that day. In that case Christians, too, should attend the mosques on Fridays and play no games in the open. It would be tyranny on the Turks' part to prevent Christian subjects from keeping their Sabbath in their own way, provided that Turkish officers could supervise the Christians and prevent sedition or

gross immorality. It need not be tyranny to compel the Christians to go to mosque on Fridays, and would not be tyranny if such an edict increased the welfare and security of the Turkish realm.

Of Watts's other philosophical writings the chief are his dissertation on the passions and a series of four 'conferences' or dialogues concerning the sufficiency of natural religion for religious purposes. From Descartes to Hume an attempt to bring the passions into some sort of orderly hierarchy was a favourite exercise of philosophical skill. According to Watts admiration (or wonder), love and hatred were the master passions from which desire and aversion, complacency and displicence and so forth could be educed. He gave many directions for restraining some passions and encouraging others, all with the view of reaching divine love as the commanding passion; but his *Doctrine of the Passions* was not of outstanding quality. Neither were his dialogues entitled *The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason*, though these had many readers. The Ciceronian form of philosophical dialogue (which Watts employed) needs much less dramatic skill than the Platonic; but it needs more than Watts contrived to give it. Again, while, of course, Watts was entitled to choose as the representative of deism a highly respectable, indeed a blameless 'Logisto' who, in argument, habitually went into action armed with little more than a white flag, he could not reasonably expect those who took such matters seriously to be impressed by the surrender of a deist who, argumentatively, was so irresolute and indeed so eager to give way.

Brief as this account of Watts's philosophical pieces has been, it has been long enough to show that his work in this kind was extensive and varied, and that his achievement was considerable. These particular pieces may not deserve to be ranked as English literature, but it was art, not chance, which fitted the exposition so precisely to the readers addressed, which preserved such an excellent logical order, which either avoided forbidding technicalities or made them positively inviting by the use of simple English and familiar but telling illustrations that were never

vulgar. If there could be literature in text-books, Watts had found the secret.

To Watts himself, however, all these writings were mere by-works, mere parerga. 'As every man has some amusements for an hour of leisure', he said, in the preface to his *Reliquiae Juveniles*, 'I have chosen mathematical science, philosophy and poesy for mine.' His life's work was in none of them, he believed. They only touched the hem of his profession. His health interfered with some part of his activities as preacher and as pastor, but it did not prevent his primary duty, the study and exposition of divinity.

In the memoir in the sumptuous edition of his *Works*, published in 1810, Watts is said to have preached with an admirable enunciation and in part extempore despite the extent to which preaching drained his vitality. The first of these six massive volumes contains fifty-five sermons and a dozen discourses. It is easy to verify in them the simplicity of style and the orderly logical arrangement to which the memoir paid proper tribute. Much of them, one may be sure, used to be heard from many pulpits.

In matters of divinity, Watts engaged himself more and more with the doctrine of the Trinity. He began with a short statement of *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* in twenty-two propositions duly but briefly expounded and defended, his intention being to defend the *scriptural* doctrine of the Trinity since even Athanasian metaphysics, to say nothing of the more elaborate analyses of the schoolmen, could never be essential to the salvation of any single private Christian. In this early statement Watts tried to avoid nice disputations and the private hypotheses to which he himself inclined, postponing all such things to a later occasion. By the end, partly in reply to criticism, his disquisitions had become undeniably bulky.

'I have often asserted', he said, 'and repeat it again, that when I express the doctrine of the Trinity by three persons being one God I mean no more than that there are three who have sufficient communion in one Godhead to have proper divine names, titles and attributes ascribed to them, and sufficient distinction from

each other to maintain the various characters and offices that are assigned to them in Scripture.' He denied arianism or socinianism by offering scriptural proof of the full divinity ascribed to the Second and Third persons, and took the unity of the Godhead to be an ample scriptural refutation of sabellianism and, still more, of simple tritheism.

Certainly he was nowhere near tritheism. For him the 'persons' in the Godhead were 'characters' or 'offices'—in short 'powers'—an 'economical' or functional division which, at the very most, might be said to be expressed less misleadingly in personal language than in any other. Thus he remarked: 'If the divine nature of Christ be another distinct principle of self-consciousness and volition, another distinct spiritual being, or another spirit, this approaches so near to the doctrine of another God, that it is very hard to distinguish it'; and he appealed to 'arithmetic and reason'. He also said: 'I will never contend with my brother, or fellow Christian who scruples to use the word *person* in this doctrine.'

It may not be so clear why Watts was not an arian. For him Godhead was *one*, just one essence. He was openly antagonistic to the 'procession' of the Holy Spirit and not at all respectful to the term 'filiation', if supposed to be explanatory of the *modus fiendi* of the Second Person. In the main the reason why Watts was not an arian—I mean in essentials—was that the arians held, with respect, say, to the Second Person in the Trinity, that *all* his 'offices', as mediator, as manifestation and the like, were derivative, whereas, according to Watts, it was only Christ's *human* soul not his *divine* soul that was thus subordinate in any sense at all.

In his own speculations, for which he claimed no more than that they had scriptural warrant and were the conclusions towards which he inclined, Watts developed the view, with some help from Goodwin and others, that Christ's *human* soul was fashioned in some unknown but glorious manner before the creation of the world, and so was not a creature though still but a human soul and

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not divine, that it (i.e. the Logos) might 'become flesh' literally in due time and more generally in the creative way of which the first chapter in First Colossians spoke. In this sense it was Christ who walked in the Garden of Eden, appeared unto Moses and heartened Gideon. But still the human not the divine Christ even before all worlds were made.

Chapter V

SHANDEAN PHILOSOPHY

I DON'T INTEND to discuss Sterne's private conduct, character and morals. The Recording Angel, I think, even if he blotted out part of the record with a tear, must also have sighed at the complexity of what remained. Even if Sterne had been what Thackeray says he was—and Thackeray's mind was very unlike the Recording Angel's—rogue, coward, snivelling mountebank, vain, wicked, witty and false, the fact would be irrelevant when, as Sterne said, his pen managed him, not he his pen. True, if he had had no philanthropy in him, if his sentimental humanitarianism had been all pretence, his pages must have shown it. But they didn't. Thackeray himself admitted 'a kind nature speaking' and 'a real sentiment' in the description of the poor donkey solaced with Yorick's macaroon. And Sterne's parishioners adored him.

Sterne's professional standards are also irrelevant to a discussion of Shandean philosophy. Many a man is prepared to sell his soul for a joke. Among men there are a good many parsons. In this enthymeme of the first order there is a reasonable chance of contact in the middle term though not of its ultra-total distribution. In other words, we should not be astonished to find that some parsons have been prepared to sell their souls for a joke. If Sterne disgraced his cloth, let his cloth do the censuring. In fact Sterne endangered none of his livings. Though he wrote 'not to be fed but to be famous', he was very well fed; and he had bishops among his admirers, including Warburton for a time.

Certainly, there is irony in finding that Sterne in his *Sermons* deplored the 'levity in discourse' of his age in addition to its other 'indecorums (which is a softer name for vices)', and declared that 'the court of Charles the Second first broke in upon and, I fear, has almost demolished the outworks of religion, of modesty

and of sober manners'. Sterne's apologists, in the days when his smutty jesting was agreed to require an apology, excused him on the ground that he had to suit his nonsense to the fashion of the times. It was not an age, they said, in which humorists could afford to keep to good clean fun, not Thackeray's age with 'the innocent laughter and the sweet and unsullied page which the author of *David Copperfield* gives to my children'. Such excuses should be brushed away. Sterne was what he was. He could never have written for Thackeray's children.

Some may think that Sterne's books have perennial vitality not because of but in spite of their faded salacities. These salacities, such people may say, were not all Attic salt, and even Attic salt does not last for ever. Sterne's digressions were about all manner of things, often quite pudic—those digressions which, as he said, were 'the sunshine, the life, the soul of reading', those digressions which he managed so artfully in his controlled backward rambles. Besides, it is uncle Toby and the other dear people in Shandy Hall, both in the parlour and in the kitchen, who live for ever. None of them was a wanton. The 'so concupiscible' Widow Wadman and her Bridget were neighbours only; and uncle Toby was the soul of modesty. Sterne, it is true, planned and wrote an obstetrical romance, but his philosophy was not the philosophy of a lying-in hospital. His Cervantic method, as he liked to call it, required him, in his own words, to describe 'silly and trifling events with the circumstantial pomp of great ones'. Birth is not a trifling event, but Sterne was bound to pomp it circumstantially.

These arguments have a certain force but not nearly enough. Many of Sterne's salacities have lost their savour if they ever had that quality; but the most savourless of them are in the digressions, such as his Slawkenbergian performance. In general, wit that is salted in that particular way keeps very well. There is no age which does not droll it on that subject. No doubt there can be too much of it. The approach delicate to an aposiopesis can be overused, and Sterne did overuse it. Again, uncle Toby's modesty was part of the joke, the joke of innocence in a naughty world.

We may, we are almost bound to think of so much else in uncle Toby's character as to pay much less attention than Sterne did to this particular trait, this military anomaly in him. But Sterne was very circumstantial about it.

What did Sterne himself say about his Shandean aims, method and philosophy?

First, he wrote to amuse. 'If 'tis wrote against anything', he said in and of *Tristram Shandy*, 'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen', and in one of his letters he said that he was 'fabricating for the laughing part of the world; for the melancholy part of it I have nothing but my prayers; and so God help them'. There is no need for a philosophical discussion about this part of his intentions.

Secondly, like other satirists, like his 'dear Rabelais and dearer Cervantes', he professed to be bent upon unmasking pomposity and hypocrisy, though not in set pieces (which he abhorred), not as a saint-errant, and not with savagery of spirit. 'I'll take a good rattling gallop but I'll not hurt the poorest jackass upon the road.' 'Give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears on my outside', he wrote on an early page of *Tristram Shandy*. In his letters he declared that one of his aims was 'the hope of doing the world good, by ridiculing what I thought deserving of it, or of disservice to sound learning, etc.' The dissertation on Noses, he said in another letter, was 'levelled at those learned blockheads who in all ages have wasted their time and much learning upon points as foolish'. And all with caution. 'I deny I have gone as far as Swift; he keeps a due distance from Rabelais; I keep a due distance from him. Swift has said a hundred things I durst not say unless I was Dean of St Patrick's.'

Certainly there was plenty of canting humbug in Sterne's age, therefore ample opportunity for a whimsical jester who preferred light and derisive tapping to the buffets of Rabelaisian clowning. On the other hand, especially in the matter of noses, it has to be confessed that Sterne, the cautious Rabelaisian, was decidedly imitative, and that most of his victims were already in disgrace.

In the time of Rabelais, scholastic pedantry was very well mounted and the world needed its unhorsing, even if, as the world would now admit, there was much better stuff in medieval scholasticism than the Renaissance and the New World between them were disposed to allow when the fight was on. But what important service was Sterne performing when he attacked Crackenthorp and Burgersdicius, a pair of useful logicians, the latter of whom, a Dutchman, had produced a solid manual of logic extensively used in English and in Scottish universities, as well as in several countries on the Continent, for a protracted period? Descartes and Locke between them, in the previous century, had said all that was necessary about the defects of the syllogism regarded as an instrument of discovery. Sterne, by the ringside, was cuffing some belated or imaginary partisan after the big fight was over. And the furtive Rabelaisianism of his methods was imitative too.

Thirdly, Sterne had the major business, he said, of inculcating the duty of a kindly humanitarianism towards all the world. Describing, in a letter, his aims in the *Sentimental Journey*, he wrote: 'My design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do; so it runs most upon those gentler passions and affections which aid so much to it.' 'Good nature', according to another letter, was his 'vile errantry, as Sancho says.' It was also, he thought, a sentimental philosophy.

Clearly this general design was not in itself a novelty, especially for a Christian clergyman. The love of one's neighbour and indeed of all sentient creatures was not a doctrine that had to await Sterne's discovery. But if he advanced it he might still have been advancing a true philosophy of planetary existence. It is unreasonable to ask for more from any moral philosopher, and here are some to-day who, having come across certain snatches from Sterne, conclude forthwith that he was the most effective apostle of benevolence in modern times. Some years ago, in Texas, I was present at a meeting of a Rotary Club where a professional rotarian speaker, imported for the occasion and a

man of some culture as well as of eloquence, took Sterne for his theme and treated him, quite simply, as a fountain of the purest humanitarianism, 'a dear good old clergyman' whose pages were just what rotarians (and, I suppose, their children) should devour.

For this part of his task, Sterne conceived himself to be equipped with the most exquisite sensibility that ever was. 'I laugh till I cry', he said in one of his letters, 'and in some tender moments *cry till I laugh*.' In another letter he wrote: 'Praised be God for my sensibility. Though it has often made me wretched, yet I would not exchange it for all the pleasure the grossest sensualist ever felt.' In yet another letter he declared: "'Tis true an author must feel himself or his reader will not; but I have torn my whole frame into pieces by my feelings.'

Had this racking, wrecking, bubbling sensibility any philosophy behind it, any framework of sentimental principles which invited examination and were capable of withstanding criticism? Sterne often spoke of the place of sentiment in the French philosophy of life. 'Let me entreat you [madam] to study the pure and sentimental parts of the best French romances.' Commenting upon the French, however, after returning from their country, he wrote to a friend that 'notwithstanding they make such a pother about the *word* [sentiment] they have no precise idea annexed to it'. Had Sterne himself such a precise idea?

If he had, he preferred to keep it up his inky sleeve. But that may have been his method and his art. 'Eugenius, said I, stepping before him, and laying my hand upon his breast—to define—is to distrust—Thus I triumphed over Eugenius; but I triumphed over him, as I always do, like a fool.' Can we collect Sterne's philosophy of sentiment from the picture he gave of it?

Whether or not the *Sentimental Journey* had a philosophy, it certainly had a programme. There were plenty of guide books, especially of the sort suitable for nobly or gently born puppies 'under the direction of governors recommended by Oxford, Aberdeen and Glasgow' (Sterne himself was a Cambridge man, from Jesus College). Smollett had exploited the travel novel of

incident sufficiently for the market. So Sterne would write a sentimental travel book, ignoring travellers idle, inquisitive, lying, proud, vain, splenetic, compulsory, felonious, unfortunate, innocent and simple, and lavishing his skill upon the *susceptible* traveller. He achieved his aim. He made hearts bleed and flutter joyfully too. He grieved over captive starlings, over Maria, over the dead ass. He exchanged snuff-boxes with the Franciscan to whom he had churlishly refused an alms. He was tender to mistress and maid, put 'cases of delicacy', with all his sensibility explored the truth of the Terentian adage *a me nil alienum*. He was all for true feeling, and, according to a letter, had convinced himself that 'if it is not thought a chaste book, mercy on them that read it, for they must have warm imaginations'. In short he showed a sympathy that was warm, exquisite and frail. That, if anything, was his philosophy.

Parts of the same picture in *Tristram Shandy* are very confusing indeed; for instance, the series of scenes that succeeded the receipt of the news from foreign parts that Bobby, Tristram Shandy's much older brother, had died. In the kitchen we have the foolish scullion: 'He is dead, said Obadiah!—he is certainly dead....So am not I, said the foolish scullion.' We have also the garrulous Corporal Trim's harangue on the theme that all flesh is grass with some account of Susannah's attitude towards the corporal. Among the Shandy family we have a very curious incident. Mr Walter Shandy stoically composed a philosopheme upon mortality with abundant references to the Christian Fathers, to Cicero, to Socrates, and attempted to communicate his views to his brother Toby. Mrs Shandy, eavesdropping, confused the number of Socrates's children with the number of her husband's. 'Then, cried my mother opening the door, you have one more, Mr Shandy, than I know of—By heaven! I have one less, said my father, getting up and walking out of the room.'

In short, I think we have to say that if Sterne had a sentimental philosophy of goodwill to his fellow-creatures, it was unexcogitated philosophy which he was content to leave unexcogitated.

This has to be said even of Sterne's picture of uncle Toby, although Sterne was at pains to tell us not merely *that* uncle Toby was a wholly lovable being but also *why* he was so. (It says much for Sterne's surpassing skill as a novelist that uncle Toby, in speech and in action, was just as lovable as Sterne so often tells us he was.) Sterne was saying 'Here is human goodheartedness in its perfection. Why argue about it? Why philosophize?' The appropriate comment was the superlative of Jonathan the coachman: 'I would sooner drive such a gentleman for seven pounds a year than some for eight.'

'There was a frankness in my uncle Toby,' said Sterne, 'not the *effect* of familiarity but the *cause* of it, which let you see at once into his soul and showed you the goodness of his nature. To this there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, super-added which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him.' 'His humour was of that particular species which does honour to our atmosphere.' 'Gently, with faithful Trim behind thee didst thou ramble round the little circle of thy pleasures, jostling no creature by the way; for each man's sorrows thou had a tear—for each man's needs thou had'st a shilling.' 'He was of a peaceful placid nature—all was mixed up so kindly within him, my uncle Toby had scarce a heart to retaliate upon a fly—Go, says he one day at dinner to an overgrown one which had buzzed about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner time, and which after infinite attempts he had caught at last, as it flew by him—I'll not hurt thee, says my uncle Toby, rising from the chair and going across the room, with the fly in his hand—I'll not hurt a hair of thy head—Go, says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape; go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me—I was but ten years old when this happened; but whether it was that the action itself was more in unison with my nerves at that age of pity, which instantly sent my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation, or how far the manner and

expression of it might go towards it, or in what degree or by what secret magic a tone of voice and harmony of movement attuned by mercy might find a passage to my heart I know not—this I know, that the lesson of universal goodwill, then taught and imprinted by my uncle Toby has never since been worn out of my mind...I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression.'

That, unhygienically, was the sentimental philosophy, to which may be added another impression of uncle Toby. When the Peace of Utrecht came, when the French, 'a nation that will always pop at you', popped no longer and there were no more sieges to be enacted on the bowling green, when uncle Toby's hobby-horse, in short, was put out to grass, uncle Toby could not easily bear the pleasantries which assured him that his occupation was only suspended, that there would be other wars, and other sieges to give spice to his darling amusement. Then uncle Toby, though not eloquent, found that 'the stream overflowed the man'. Did not his heart ache for the distresses of war? Had he ever supposed that anything but necessity could shape men to war, men who were 'born to love, to mercy, to kindness'? 'For what is war? What is it, Yorick, when fought as ours has been, upon principles of *liberty* and upon principles of *honour*—what is it but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the malicious and the turbulent within bounds?'

Let us pass from the sentimental to other aspects of Shandean philosophy.

The full title of Sterne's masterpiece was *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gent.* Tristram, however, was only an embryo for a large part of the narrative, and a few childish incidents exhaust what we are told of the rest of his life in the nine volumes which were all Sterne had time to complete. The opinions, again, are seldom Tristram's (though some are). The book would have been titled much more accurately had it been called *The Opinionative Atmosphere of Shandy Hall*. That opinionate atmosphere was very philosophical indeed, being dominated by a most resolute

philosopher, Mr Walter Shandy, Tristram's father. We are given some scraps of information about Mr Walter Shandy. He was very short in stature. He suffered from sciatica. He had been a Turkey merchant and cast his accounts with accuracy, but had been hastened out of trade by turning too much attention to the composition of a life of Socrates. He was a careful landlord and was also an adventurer in the Mississippi scheme. Pre-eminently, however, he was a philosopher, sustaining his very being by the elixir of pure argument. 'Everything is this world', he held, 'is big with jest and has wit in it and instruction too if we can but find it out.'

There is no possible doubt about this. Mr Walter Shandy was 'a philosopher in grain, speculative, systematical'. In the coach to London he 'would do nothing but syllogize within himself for a stage or two together'. He had 'extensive views of things'. 'Like all systematic reasoners he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture everything in nature to support a hypothesis.' ('What is the character of a family to an hypothesis?' he would ask when he supported his views by citing the awful example of 'my aunt Dinah' and the coachman.) He was as persistent as he was 'argute', having in 'his temper what is called perseverance in a good cause and obstinacy in a bad one'. Above all he was an original in his philosophy. He had 'a thousand little sceptical notions of the comic kind to defend'. 'Mr Shandy, my father, sir, would see nothing in the light in which others placed it—he placed things in his own light—he would weigh nothing in common scales.' 'My father stood up for all his opinions; he had spared no pains in picking them up, and the more they lay out of the common way the better still was his title.' 'He had a skirmishing, cutting kind of a slashing way with him, and soon had everyone against him.'

The 'plaguy' part of Mr Walter Shandy's lot was that, with the occasional exception of Yorick, there was no one in or near Shandy Hall who was interested in ideas or curious about them. Mrs Shandy had developed the protective technique of agreeing with

everything whatever that her husband said. When he 'argued the matter with her like a Christian—like a heathen—like a husband—like a father—like a patriot—like a man', nothing disturbed her technique; and no idea moved her in any way at all. 'I am very short myself', continued my father gravely. 'You are very short, Mr Shandy', said my mother. There was a silence for three minutes and a half. So poor Mr Shandy was baulked every time. 'It was a consuming vexation to my father that my mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand. That she is not a woman of science, my father would say, is her misfortune—But she might ask a question.' Uncle Toby had no such technique, unless his *argumentum fistulatorium*, his whistling of Lillibullero, could be regarded as an unintentional technique. But he was equally devastating either because his brother's discourse aroused no ideas in him, or because it aroused wrong ones. The first case was common enough. 'Do you understand the theory of that affair?' replied my father—Not I, quoth my uncle—But you have some ideas, said my father, of what you talk about?—No more than my horse, replied my uncle Toby.' The second was even more usual. The cause of it, nearly always, was uncle Toby's one-track military mind. At one point in the narrative, Mr Walter Shandy, overwhelmed by the succession of misfortunes that attended young Tristram's birth, took to his bed in despair. 'Did ever a poor unfortunate man, brother Toby, receive so many lashes?—The most I ever saw given, quoth my uncle Toby, was to a grenadier, I think in Mackay's regiment', and sent for Trim to verify the circumstance.

While Mr Walter Shandy had 'dipped into all kinds of books', and, besides his interest in the life of Socrates, had a considerable if desultory acquaintance with Greek philosophy and with patristic and medieval theology, the attitude and temper of his philosophical thinking were thoroughly permeated with Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*. He was an ardent follower of Locke's 'new way of ideas' and of the names 'annexed' to them. Having a mind of original stamp he did not accept all Locke's conclu-

sions. In political theory, for instance, he was on Sir Robert Filmer's side, not on Locke's, and certain of the cardinal features of Mr Shandy's philosophy such as his views upon the supreme importance of Christian names and upon the proper technique of midwives were not derived from Locke. Shandean philosophy, however, was an elaborate application of Locke's methods.

This is so clear as to need very little argument in support. *Ex abundantia*, however, a piece of internal and a piece of external evidence may be cited. In *Tristram Shandy* we read: 'Pray, sir, in all the reading which you have ever read, did you ever read such a book as Locke's *Essay upon the Human Understanding*—Don't answer me rashly—because many, I know, quote the book who have not read it—and many have read it who understand it not...If either of these is your case, as I write to instruct, I will tell you in these words what the book is—It is a history. A history of whom? what? where? when?...Don't hurry yourself—It is a history book, Sir, (which may possibly recommend it to the world) of what passes in a man's own mind; and if you will say so much of the book and no more, believe me you will cut no contemptible figure in a metaphysic circle.' The external evidence comes from Suard, a great admirer and sedulous companion of Sterne when he was in France. Sterne told Suard that his study of Locke 'had begun in youth and continued through life'. Locke's influence could be seen 'in all his pages, in all his lines, in all his expressions'. Locke's, Sterne went on, was 'a philosophy which never attempts to explain the miracle of sensation; but, reverently leaving that miracle in the hands of God, it unfolds all the secrets of the mind; and shunning the errors to which other theories of knowledge are exposed, it arrives at all truths accessible to the understanding.... A sacred philosophy, without which the world will never have a true universal religion, a true science of morals, nor will man without it ever attain to real command over nature.'¹

How good a Lockean, then, was Laurence Sterne?

It must be confessed that the lengthy passage in which Sterne

¹ Quoted by Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, p. 282.

attacked Locke is not very impressive. This was Sterne's 'Author's Preface' characteristically inserted in chapter xx of volume III of *Tristram Shandy*, and dealing, chiefly, with the relations between wit and judgment. 'The great Locke', Sterne said, 'who was seldom outwitted by false sounds, was nevertheless bubbled here....Instead of sitting down coolly, as such a philosopher should have done, to have examined the matter of fact before he philosophized upon it—on the contrary, he took the fact for granted [i.e. the separation of the two] and so joined in with the cry, and halloo'd it as boisterously as the rest. This has been made the Magna Charta of stupidity ever since.'

For Locke 'judgment' (III, xiv, § 3)¹ was a technical term describing the sound estimate of probabilities where demonstrative certainty or 'knowledge' (in the sense of utterly pellucid certainty) was not to be had. Locke held that the distinction was absolute, and of enormous importance. Indeed, the greater part of Book IV of the *Essay* and a very large part of the labours of Locke's successors, such as Hume, Sterne's contemporary, were expressly directed to showing how little in the sciences and in common life was demonstrable with certainty, how much was only 'judgment' or probability. While several eminent philosophers have tried to outflank Locke's position with dispositions of their forces which they consider profound, there is no evidence that Sterne's comments on this matter had any profundity whatever. He seems, quite simply, to have had no idea, in his preface, of what the dispute was about. As for 'wit', i.e. quickness and perspicuity in grasping the agreements, differences, and argumentative promise in the relations of ideas, Locke's term for *such* 'wit' was 'sagacity', and he stated in the clearest possible terms that 'sagacity' was essential *both* for 'judgment' *and* for 'knowledge' (II, iv, § 3 and IV, xvii, § 2).

Except for this lapse, Sterne's use of Locke's *Essay* was accurate, extensive and detailed. Thus Tristram's first, piece of bad luck was an unfortunate association of ideas in his parents at

¹ References in this form to Locke's *Essay* in Fraser's edition.

the time of his begetting. According to the sagacious Mr Locke the association of ideas accounted for what Sterne called 'more wry actions' than any other cause of error. Locke treated it, indeed, not like the later associationists as the principle of mental cohesion but invariably as a kind of 'madness' (II, xxxiii, § 3). So Sterne interpreted him faithfully. Locke also (and inconsistently with his general mode of exposition) gave a psycho-physiological explanation of the phenomenon (*ibid.* § 6) tracing it to the 'animal spirits'. So did Sterne although Sterne's ultra-traducianism was also ultra-Lockean.

Again, as he said, Sterne's list of the causes of obscurity of ideas in the second chapter of his second volume of *Tristram Shandy* was borrowed wholesale from Locke (II, xxix, § 3). Similarly of Mr Walter Shandy's much-interrupted disquisition on duration and its simple modes where uncle Toby, without any metaphysics in his head, spontaneously promulgated the Lockean theory that our varying estimates of time are due entirely to the succession of our ideas, and his brother, after partially recovering from his surprise at such unexpected perspicuity, received a second shock when uncle Toby, on being told that the 'true scholastic pendulum' was the psychological clock of our ideas revolving like the images in a lanthorn warmed by a candle, protested that his ideas succeeded one another like a revolving smoke-jack. The psychological clock and the simile of the lanthorn were Locke's (II, xiv, § 9). Uncle Toby's amended simile hit his brother's fancy, and kept it for a long time; it was so apt a description of so many mental processes.

Once again Sterne's account of the art of ratiocination near the end of his third volume with its reference to yard-sticks is entirely Locke's (II, xvii, § 18), including the reference to the putative intuitive powers of angels, although the comment that animals 'syllogize by their nose' is more Shandean.

In addition to its primary contention about ideas, Locke's *Essay* was full of a secondary but still a very vital contention about the need for univocal words to name the ideas. This also

played a large part in Shandean philosophy. Indeed, uncle Toby, much troubled by words, needed actual models, and was ill content with maps and plans. 'I think, quoth Corporal Trim, with humble submission to your Honour's better judgment, that these ravelins, bastions, curtains and hornworks make but a poor contemptible fiddle-faddle piece of work of it here upon paper, compared with what your Honour and I could make of it were we in the country by ourselves, and had but a rood, or a rood and a half of ground, to do what we pleased with.'

In this matter of the use of words Mr Walter Shandy made a constructive advance upon Locke's theories in the third part of his *Tristrapaedia*. That work had its Shandean defects. As regards its timing it lagged so far behind Tristram's development as to have no practical application to his training. Indeed, Mr Shandy was so busy upon his *Tristrapaedia* during Tristram's early years that the child, until Le Fèvre's son became his tutor, was entirely in his mother's care or Susannah's. As regards its contents the 'introductory preface' or 'prefatory introduction' of thirty pages was, by Mr Shandy's own admission, 'a little dry', as patriarchal theories of household or civil polity are apt to be. The second part, dealing with medicine and attacking Hippocrates and Francis Bacon, was (shall we say?) imperfectly scientific. But the third part, as I have maintained, was a constructive appendix to Locke, a point which Mr Shandy fully appreciated since he regarded the third part as a 'North-West Passage to the intellectual world'.

Locke, who spared no pains in his account of ideas, the materials or the bricks of our knowledge, was much less industrious and much less informative in his account of the way in which we assembled and separated them, being content for the most part and with the exception of a short chapter on 'Particles' (III, vii) to accept traditional views about composition, abstraction and the like. Here Mr Shandy, with a true philosopher's eye, discerned the approaches to his North-West Passage. What was necessary, and what Locke had very largely overlooked, was an adequate

grasp of the function and true office of the auxiliary verbs.¹ A tutor's business was not only to stock the pupil's mind with ideas, but also to open the pupil's mind and 'set his imagination loose' upon these ideas. This should be done by constant drill in the potentialities of syntax, in the auxiliary verbs and their thought forms, interpreted widely so as to include the question form, the conditional form, the form which asserts necessary connection and generally what logicians call modality. 'The use of the *Auxiliaries*', Mr Shandy told Yorick, 'is at once to set the soul agoing by herself upon the materials as they are brought her, and by the versatility of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracks of enquiry and make every idea engender millions....By the right use and application of these, in which a child's memory should be exercised, there is no one idea can enter his brain, how barren soever, but a magazine of conceptions and conclusions may be drawn forth from it.'

This theory in the *Tristrapaedia* is, I think, Sterne's only serious attempt to improve upon Lockean principles on Lockean lines. For the most part if Locke's views contained difficulties, the same difficulties are to be found in the unsuspecting Sterne.

An instance is Sterne's views on conscience, the theme of his sermons on 'Self-knowledge', 'Self-examination', 'The Abuses of Conscience considered', as well as of the sermon which Corporal Trim read so dramatically to the Shandy brothers and the man-midwife while they awaited events so loquaciously.

This sermon was not a model of philosophical argument. It begins by asserting that a man *must* be privy to his own thoughts and cannot be mistaken about them. Then it goes on to say that although the thing must be so, it isn't so if the man be sinful, prejudiced in his own favour, a casuist or the like. Therefore, in addition to his own conscience, a man must pay heed to the great inseparables, the laws of God and the eternal measures of right and wrong.

Plainly if every man *must* have an infallible acquaintance with

¹ Just mentioned in § 1 of Locke's chapter on 'Particles'.

his own mind, heart and motives nothing can disturb that infallibility—not 'interest', not 'ease', not 'pride'. Sterne, perhaps, might have distinguished consistently between having the evidence to perfection and assessing it correctly; but he didn't even do that. Instead, he accepted Locke's principle (e.g. II, i, § 9) that 'having ideas' and 'perception' (i.e. consciousness and self-consciousness) 'are the same thing', saw that it didn't work in the given case, and calmly proceeded to give reasons for the falsity of a *truth*. That is not an intelligible way of arguing.

A sermon, it is true, is not an ideal vehicle for conveying serious metaphysics. Its principal aim is to strike upon the minds of unphilosophical hearers for twenty minutes or half an hour. But it is better for having a sound philosophy behind it.

I do not think that Sterne's *Sermons* give evidence of such a philosophy. They are elegant compositions, admirably phrased—'eating the bread of carefulness', 'hastily snatching at some little fugacious pleasures', 'the dry offer of a faint civility', 'a daughter of Abraham as well as of Eve', 'the crusading sword of the misguided saint-errant'. There is nothing forced or stilted about these abundant beauties, no special emphasis upon them, and most of them withstand scrutiny much better than the famous 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb' of the *Sentimental Journey*. (It is sheep, not lambs, that are usually shorn, and the ascription of the clemencies of shearing time to the Deity reminds one of the argument that God's providence is demonstrated by his provision of so many river-mouths near large towns.)

The sermons, also, frequently dramatic with legitimate pulpit drama, seldom so much as glance at the fields which, one might have thought, would have given irresistible enticement to Sterne's imagination, though the sermon on the Levite and his concubine is a partial exception as well as Sterne's account of the prodigalities of the prodigal son: 'How shall the youth make his father comprehend that he was cheated at Damascus by one of the best men in the world; that he had lent a part of his substance to a friend at Nineveh, who had fled off with it to the Ganges;

that a whore of Babylon had swallowed his best pearl, and anointed a whole city with his balm of Gilead; that he had been sold by a man of honour for twenty shekels of silver to a worker in graven images; that the images he had purchased had profited him nothing; that they could not be transported across the wilderness, and had been burned with fire at Shusan; that the apes and peacocks which he had sent for from Tarsis lay dead upon his hands; and that the mummies had not been dead long enough which he had brought him out of Egypt.' Some few such passages may countenance the opinion of Thomas Gray the poet:¹ 'Have you read his sermons (with his own comic figure at the head of them)? they are in the style, I think, most proper for the pulpit and show a very strong imagination and a sensible heart: but you see him often tottering on the verge of laughter and ready to throw his periwig in the face of his audience.' But there are not many of these passages and Gray's comment, on the whole, was unfair.

Moreover, there is much to show that Sterne, in the pulpit as well as out of it, used his own eyes, and busily, in the observation of human nature. 'A haughty and an abject temper, I believe, are much nearer akin than they will acknowledge.' 'The forgiveness of those, if we may be allowed the expression, whom we have injured ourselves.' 'You may tax his morals—but hint—hint but at a defect in his intellectuals, touch but that sore place.' 'Cowards have done good and kind actions; cowards have even fought, nay, sometimes have conquered; but a coward never forgave.' These *aperçus* may be questionable, but they invite meditation.

None of these qualities, however, not elegant phrasing, not imagination, not occasional acute observation, necessarily bespeaks a philosophy, and the general framework of Sterne's pulpit orations is so correct, so easily satisfied with its correctness, and so incurious of its grounds that philosophy is not its name. Popery is to be deplored; so 'the truest definition which can be given of it is that it is a pecuniary system well contrived to operate upon men's passions and weakness, whilst their pockets are o' picking'.

¹ In a letter to Wharton, July 1760.

The 'enthusiasm' of the Wesleyans is not to be imitated; so it is ascribed to 'the mechanical disturbances and conflicts of an empty belly interpreted by an empty head'. One must not be a deist. So there must be religion as well as mere morality; but beware of emphasis upon the supernaturalism of your religion. And always remember that the Church of England has an adequate answer for everything. If life in itself is strange and incalculable that is a clear demonstration of God's providence. If the wicked ever seem to flourish remember that God is 'a wise and patient judge who respites punishment to another state, declaring, for the wisest reasons, this is not the time for it to take place in'.

But if the philosophy in Sterne's sermons was not very strong, their benevolence was. Everywhere Sterne was eager to put the love of our neighbour 'upon its true bottom of philanthropy and universal kindness'. Except in a few 'reproachful' instances humanity was inseparable from our nature. 'When one considers the friendly part of our nature, without looking further one would think it impossible for a man to look upon misery without finding himself in some measure attached to the interest of him who suffers it' (though it isn't *quite* impossible). Even in the tyrant Alexander of Phœræ 'nature awoke in triumph and showed how deeply she had sown the seeds of compassion in every man's heart'. Cynicism 'could serve no end but the rooting out of our nature all that is generous'. A man 'lives to his family, to his friends, to all under his trust; and, in a word, he lives to the whole race of mankind. Whatsoever has the character of man, and wears the same image of God that he does, is truly his brother and has a just claim to his kind.'

Nor was Sterne's pulpit benevolence official and safely general. He pleaded earnestly, for instance, for the proper education of the children of the poor. 'I said therefore this was the foundation of almost every sort of charity, and, might one not have added, of all policy too?'

Multum amavit. 'Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius, for he was your kinsman.'

Chapter VI

WORDSWORTH AND 'NATURAL PIETY'

SAMUEL ALEXANDER said¹ that 'the reverent joy in nature' was what Wordsworth meant by 'natural piety', but this, although it is an accurate description of a great part of Wordsworth's attitude towards nature, may not describe what he meant by the phrase 'natural piety' itself, even on the improbable assumption that Wordsworth meant just one thing by the phrase every time he used it—in short, that he employed it as a technical term.

I have noticed three instances in which Wordsworth used the phrase. The first occurs in the early poem on the Rainbow when the poet hopes that his mature and even his aged heart may leap at the sight of that gay arch much as his child's heart did:

And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each in natural piety.

The second is in *The White Doe of Rylstone*, where the lady says of Francis:

'Tis well, for he the worst defied
Through force of natural piety.

The third is in *The Excursion* (Book III), where the despondent Solitary says:

Such acquiescence neither doth imply
In me a meekly bending spirit soothed
By natural piety, nor a lofty mind
By philosophic discipline prepared
For calm subjection to acknowledged law.

Of these it seems reasonable to say that the word 'piety' just means 'piety' in all of them, while the word 'natural', as its multi-valent habit is, alters its meaning according to the context. In the third passage, 'natural' is obviously opposed to artificial. In the

¹ *Philosophical and Literary Pieces*, p. 299.

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second the reference is to ordinary filial or family sentiment. In the first the meaning may be more complex, the poem itself being a miracle of condensation and yet pure poetry. The substance of it, however, is that the piety is authentic in the primitive experience of childhood and retains the same 'natural' stamp at every stage of a life that remains human. Towards the close of *The Prelude* the child is said to be

Worshipping then among the depth of things
As piety ordained.

Here the essential child attitude is the same, though the provenance of the child's piety is declared to be Heaven itself, the home from which the child has just come. There may also be suggestions of what Wordsworth elsewhere described as

The filial chain laid down
From the everlasting throne,
or as
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of Nature.

In the main, however, he was referring to

Feelings humble though intense
To patriotic and domestic love
Analogous.
or to

The heart in concert with that temperate awe
And natural reverence which the place inspired.

So I have to confess that it is a blunder in exegesis to interpret 'natural piety' as 'piety towards nature'. All the same, with perhaps some little encouragement from the Rainbow poem, I propose to risk the blunder and to discuss in effect the philosophy, that is, the Wordsworthian philosophy, of Wordsworth's 'reverent joy in nature'.

In part, Wordsworth's attitude to nature was quite definitely sub-philosophical. This is the part of him which sub-spiritualized and half-personified streams and clouds and hills and flowers,

calling the daffodils gay because they were yellow, dancers because they moved, jocund because they gladdened him. There is so much of this in his poems that the trouble is not to supply but to spare instances. 'A brother of the dancing leaves', 'Proud as the rainbow spanning half the vale', 'The milder minstrelsies of rural scenes', 'As quietly as spots of sky, Among the evening clouds', may suffice. They are modest bystanders in a jostling throng. The poet is rejoicing, with deliberate *naïveté*, in what he likes to fancy the pure lilt and sunny sweetness of Nature, transferring his mood to the natural occasions that stimulate it:

There's joy in the mountains,
There's life in the fountains,
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing,
The rain is over and gone.

There is no need to comment upon the truth of this. Its appeal is enough. Let us proceed instead to something more subtle.

One such subtlety has to do with imagery. Here the imagery may, as psychologists say, be 'free imagery' and also self-conscious:

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit and play with similes,
Loose types of thought in all degrees.

Sometimes, again, the 'images' may be only natural reflections, for example,

Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery.

♦

The gleam
Of unsubstantial imagery, the dream
From the hushed vale's realities transferred
To the still lake.

For the most part, however, the imagery, although wholly mental, is 'tied' and not 'free', or, in other words, is blended and interfused with the perceived reality. In the lines

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Hath fed on pageants floating through the air,
Or calentured in depth of liquid floods.

we may be doubtful about what is tied and what is free, but we can have no doubt at all that the imagery is tied when we read of:

Some happy tone
Of meditation slipping in between
The beauty coming and the beauty gone

or of

Fleecy clouds
That struggling through the western sky have won
Their pensive light from a departing sun

or attend to the invocation

Hail twilight, sovereign of the peaceful hour!
Not dull are thou as undiscerning light,
But studious only to remove from sight
Day's mutable distinctions.

The philosophy of this—for it is more than sub-philosophy—is expressed not inadequately, although much more prosaically, in the lines:

All that I beheld
Was dear and hence to finer influxes
The mind lay open, to a more exact
And close communion

and is described early in *The Excursion*, with great fullness. For there we are told that while yet a child

Deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received
A precious gift; for, as he grew in years,
With those impressions would he still compare
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes and forms;
And being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of dreams.

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This blending or interfusion of imagery with the perceptible show or face of nature suggests several paths of inquiry, and I hope to follow more than one of them. To a Wordsworthian an obvious 'intimation' is the profound unity of Nature and, indeed, of all things. To Wordsworth himself this was apparent from the early days when Nature 'to him was all in all' and advanced to the maturity of the *Tintern Abbey* poem when Wordsworth laid hold on

A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

The connection between it and 'tied' or sunken imagery is sufficiently seen in the lines:

A sea-borne service through the mountains felt
Till into one loved vision all things melt.

There can be no doubt at all that this experience of universal unity, of panmonism, was as intense as anything in Wordsworth. From its very nature it was too simple a profundity to be elaborated without risk of disaster, but Wordsworth, sometimes, was prepared to take just that risk. He maintained, for instance, that

The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged and revered with love
Was not a punctual presence but a spirit
Diffused through time and space.

This, I allow, might be only an avowal of the truth of the theological dogma of God's ubiquity, but I think it was much more than that and was meant to describe a *prius* of feeling and sentiment on which Christian theologians might build if they chose.

Similarly, on a few occasions, although comparatively seldom, Wordsworth described the specious *nunc stans* of mystical ecstasy, its apparent arrest of time itself. Thus in *Peter Bell*, with an explicit reference to hearsay (i.e. to tradition among the mystics), he wrote:

On a fair prospect some have looked
And felt, as I have heard them say,
As if the moving time had been
A thing as steadfast as the scene
On which they gazed themselves away.

But he was also prepared to attest the same on the warrant of his own private vision. In the *Tintern Abbey* lines, for instance, he described

That serene and blessed mood
In which the affections gently lead us on
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.

In *The Excursion*, as his wont was, Wordsworth was still more explicit:

Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle; sensation, soul and form
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live, they were his life;
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

In these mystical apprehensions of unity, *totum in toto ac totum in qualibet parte*, there is inevitably a 'collapse into immediacy', to use a Hegelian phrase which is not very happy even if the collapse is not an ordinary swoon but a holy swoon like St Paul's on the road to Damascus. Wordsworth, however, was prepared to describe the unity under the more examinable similitude of the 'linkage' of nature in a scale of degrees, and (correctly) declined

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to admit any ultimate antagonism between the methods. Thus, in one of his sonnets, we read:

Thoughts link by link
Enter through ears and eyesight with such gleam
Of all things that at last in fear I shrink
And leap at last from the delicious stream.

And in another poem he asks us

To note in shrub and tree, in stream and flower
That intermixture of delicious hues
Along so vast a substance, all at once,
In one impression, by connecting force
Of their own beauty, imaged in the heart.

Frequently, however, Wordsworth's conception of the linkage is a link-by-link affair with definite emphasis upon the discriminable items in the Scale of Nature and the Great Chain of Being. Thus he speaks of

The ties
That bind the perishable hours of life
Each to the other and the conscious props
By which the world of memory and thought
Exists and is sustained.

In *The Excursion* (Book IX) he says that

Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
Beyond itself, communicating good,
A simple blessing or with evil mixed.
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude, from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.

The same is true of his doctrine of degrees:

Whate'er
I saw or heard or felt was but a stream
That flowed into a kindred stream, a gale
Confederate with the current of the soul
To speed my voyage; every sound or sight
In its degree of power administered
To grandeur or to tenderness.

It is also true of several passages where the Platonism is entirely explicit. Thus *The Prelude*, Book XIII, ends with the lines:

I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world—a world too that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates,
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen and eye that sees.

Similarly, in *The Excursion* despondency is corrected by the reflection that

Happy is he who lives to understand
Not human nature only, but explores
All natures—to the end that he may find
The law that governs each; and where begins
That union, the partition where, that makes
Kind and degree among all visible beings;
The constitutions, powers and faculties
Which they inherit—cannot step beyond—
And cannot fall beneath; that do assign
To every class its station and its office
Through all the mighty commonwealth of things,
Up from the creeping plant to sovereign Man.
Such converse, if directed by a meek,
Sincere and humble spirit, teaches love;
For knowledge is delight; and such delight
Breeds love; yet, suited as it rather is
To thought and to the climbing intellect
It teaches less to love than to adore:
If that be not indeed the highest love.

Wordsworth's Platonism—more accurately, perhaps, Wordsworth's Plotinism—was not a bookish Platonism. At Cambridge he had spurned those of his teachers who elaborated

Subtle speculations, toils abstruse
Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms
Of wild ideal pageantry shaped out
From things well matched or ill, and words for things.

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It is also true that Wordsworth, like a good Christian, sought a better Platonism (or Plotinism), that is, an heavenly. Of this more anon. Frequently, however, he was an avowed Platonist as when he told us that

The passions linked to Forms so fair
And stately needs must have their share
Of noble sentiment:

when he discoursed upon

General truths which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Underpowers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind

assured us that

So build we up the being that we see;
Thus deeply drinking in the soul of things
We shall be wise perforce;

and, more generally, drew from Nature and from Natural Forms

A pleasure quiet and profound, a sense
Of permanent and universal sway
And paramount belief; there recognized
A type, for finite natures, of the one
Supreme Existence, the surpassing life
Which to the boundaries of space and time,
Of melancholy space and doleful time
Superior and incapable of change
Nor touched by weltering of passion is
And hath the name of God.

Again with a much more adequate philosophy of time than this 'doleful' theory, he assured us of a consecration

That the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt.

On the surface at least, such Platonism may seem to be a rather unnatural form of piety. It is certainly sophisticated; but Wordsworth regarded it as the natural and continuous, if

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strenuous, development of a pensive spirit, which in addition to its 'wise passiveness' was also aware that

Minds that have nothing to confer
Find little to perceive.

That also is good Platonic doctrine, even if it is sometimes a little less creaturely than what orthodox Christian theory suggests. Wordsworth accepted the responsibilities of a *vates sacer*. As he said, not very humbly,

If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
Then to the measure of that heaven-born light,
Shine poet in thy place and be content—
The stars pre-eminent in magnitude
And they that from the zenith dart their beams
(Visible though they be to half the earth,
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
Are yet of no diviner origin,
No purer essence than the one that burns
Like an untended watch-fire, on the ridge
Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees:
All are the undying offspring of one sire:
Then to the measure of the light vouchsafed
Shine poet in thy place and be content.

According to Wordsworth's own account, his spiritual pilgrimage followed a well-marked itinerary. In his 'thoughtless youth', in the 'sweet simplicities' of his 'opening life', indeed, even in 'youth's delightful prime', he was the worshipper, often the religiously intoxicated worshipper, of landscape, seascape, clouds and stars in a companionable affinity more than animal, but less than manly or humane. This never left him. If it was heresy he was content to be obdurate in the heresy:

If this be error, and another faith
Find easier access to the pious mind,
Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments that make this earth

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So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born.

But as he grew up, and studied books, and gained some acquaintance with the ways of men in cities as well as among the dales, and was stirred by his visits to the Continent where Frenchmen in revolt called upon reason to uphold their equality, their liberty and their fraternity, he came to see with increasing clearness that a poet who was faithful to his calling could not remain content with natural grandeur and skyey peace but had also to hear

The still sad music of humanity

Not harsh nor grating but of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

There had to be 'a human-heartedness about his love', 'some concord with humanity', 'sweet counsels between head and heart'. 'It was not', he said, 'until not less than two and twenty summers had been told' that he learned the lesson fully, but having learned it, he could not let it slip.

In part the lesson was sympathy, human-hearted sympathy mingling with the 'strong and holy passion' with which he had 'yielded himself to Nature'. In part, he said, it was moralism, in part it was caught up into his Platonism and into his Christian Platonism and into whatever in his Christianity was un-Platonic.

I do not think I need say very much, in general, about this 'sympathy'. Even in his 'thoughtless youth' Wordsworth's rapturous delight in Nature was (as he thought) a sort of communion, that is to say, not a mere but a companionable congruity. There seemed to be a certain reciprocity in it; a reciprocity intensely felt and none the weaker at its pre-intellectual stage. Such pre-intellectual communion is just sympathy in its oldest and most literal sense. From this no prodigious advance was necessary 'for the delight of a few natural hearts'. The sympathy might be disturbed and disturbing.

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Fitfully and in flashes through his soul
Like sun-lit tempests, troubled transports roll.

More frequently, however, the poet was anxious to catch

The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life our nature breeds,
An instinct call it, a blind sense,
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how nor whence,
Nor whither going,

and sought diligently for that which

Shed a spark divine
Into the torpid breast of daily life.

He trained himself

To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon the unassuming things which hold
A silent station in this beauteous world.

Indeed, he had only to amplify his earlier attitude:

Vain is the glory of the sky,
The beauty vain of field and grove,
Unless while with admiring eye
We look, we also learn to love.

Wordsworth's moralism is quite another story. As his *Ode to Duty* declared, the expanding love and expansive sympathy that have just been described were not enough. The 'genial sense of youth' even if the spirit of it is 'not unwisely bold' is overbold, and wrong as well as unwise, if it retains its serene confidence in the sufficiency of the belief that 'love is an unerring light, And joy its own security'. Duty is a rod as well as a light. It implies the sternness of law, and although Wordsworth, in this ode, appears to be content with the opinion that natural law, inflexibly preserving the stars from 'wrong', is all that the 'genial' spirit of youth has forgotten, it is clear that this opinion, philo-

sophically speaking, is superficial. No doubt an ethical monotheist, like Wordsworth, having accepted moralism as a premiss in his theism is able to extract as much moralism as he wants by way of conclusion. No doubt also Wordsworth himself, being, as he said, 'somewhat stern in temperament, Withal a happy man', found such a cosmic moralism harmonious with his own cast of mind. To maintain as he did, however, that Nature-worship, of its own motion and of its own natural growth, burgeons into *duty*, into promise-keeping, into the awful as well as into the tender moral virtues, into conviction of sin and acknowledgment of wrongdoing, is to conceal and not to overcome fundamental difficulties.

Consider, for instance, the familiar stanza:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.

If this 'may' means nothing more than 'may suggest', the appropriate comment is that anything may suggest anything, but that the aspersion upon 'all the sages' is silly if the meaning be that the vernal wood really is pregnant with moral philosophy or with a morality superior to all philosophy. How would the vernal wood tell Regulus whether he should or should not keep his word and return to Carthage for torture?

In the main Wordsworth himself renounced such extravagances. As he said:

Think if thou on beauty leanest,
Think how pitiful that stay
Did not virtue give the meanest
Charms superior to decay.

or

Climes which the sun who sheds the brightest day
Earth knows, is all unworthy to obey,
Yet there the soul shall enter which hath earned
That privilege by virtue.

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or

Blest pilgrims surely as they took for guide
A will by sovereign conscience sanctified,
Blest while their spirits from the woods ascend
Along a galaxy that knows no end
But in His glory who for sinners died.

or

That He who guides and governs all approves
When gratitude though disciplined to look
Beyond the transient spheres doth wear a crown
Of earthly hope put on with trembling hand.

The truth is that Wordsworth's thought, like his own skylark's, was the thought of the wise who soar but do not roam, true to the kindred points of heaven and home. He loved heaven too well to forget its graciousness and earth too well to despise its humblest nook. In all his thought, therefore, though with variations in emphasis as his ideas grew, there is, in Hobbes's language, both a 'motion towards' and a 'motion fromwards'.

The 'motion towards' is the note of aspiration. Wordsworth had moods, it is true, in which the quietude of Grasmere seemed almost sufficient: ~

But list, a voice is near,
Great Pan himself, low whispering through the reeds. ~
Be thankful thou; for if unholy deeds
Ravage the world, tranquillity is here; ~

and he was prepared to admit that certain of the pagans had been 'not unblest' in comparison with modern industrialists. But he knew that Pan was not the summit of divinity.

O'er the whole earth, on mountain and on plain
Dwells in the affections and the soul of man,
A godhead like the universal Pan
But more exalted, with a brighter train.

Christian aspiration soared higher. It was full of 'Forward' looking thoughts and stirrings of inquietude'. Every Christian (echoing Samuel Daniel, I am told) knew that 'unless above

himself he can, Exalt himself how poor a thing is man', that

We live by adoration, hope and love,
And even as these are well and widely fixed
In dignity of being we ascend.

Therefore

Wonder not

If high the transport, great the joy I felt
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love.

The 'motion fromwards' was equally essential. Heaven was the source of 'the light that never was on sea or land, The consecration and the poet's dream'. There were angels too and over-earthly potencies:

The power
Which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the universe.

Therefore

Not alone

Mid gloom and tumult, but no less mid fair
And tranquil scenes, let universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is moved with feelings of delight to me
Came strengthened with a superadded soul,
A virtue not its own.

But even the angels had a certain tenderness for the pleasant earth. A fragment torn from the magnificent *Vernal Ode* establishes Wordsworth's thoughts on this theme:

Though all that feeds on nether air
Howe'er magnificent or fair,

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Grows but to perish, and entrust
Its ruins to their kindred dust;
Yet by the Almighty's ever-during care
Her procreant vigils nature keeps
Amid the unfathomable deeps:
And saves the peopled fields of earth
From dread of emptiness or dearth.
Thus in their stations, lifting tow'ards the sky
The foliated head in cloud-like majesty
The shadow-casting race of trees survive:
Thus, in the train of spring, arrive
Sweet flowers—what living eye hath viewed
Their myriads?—endlessly renewed,
Wherever strikes the sun's glad ray:
Where'er the subtle waters stray;
Wherever sportive zephyrs bend
Their course or genial showers descend!
Mortals rejoice! The very angels quit
Their mansions unsusceptible of change,
Amid your pleasant bowers to sit,
And through your sweet vicissitudes to range.

Up to the present I have attempted to trace the pattern of Wordsworth's 'natural piety' by a lavish use of quotation from his verse and with economy, even with parsimony, of commentary. The task was the easier because few of our poets, even apart from the explicit autobiography of *The Prelude*, have been more determined to reveal themselves than Wordsworth was. As the pastor said of another in the ninth book of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth was constitutionally intent upon noting what

Refreshed his thoughts;
Beyond its natural elevation raised
His introverted spirit; and bestowed
Upon his life an outward dignity
Which all acknowledged.

More in detail, I have tried to show that Wordsworth began with a sort of Nature worship which, like pantheism, was rather a communion with and participation in the soul of all being in its gracious ubiquity than the awestruck worship of a numinous

reality above the worshipper. This reverent joy in nature, sometimes this joy without the reverence, was a stronger force in his youth and adolescence than any Sunday school stories. He retained it, and was glad to retain it all his days. With books and philosophy to develop it (and not to strangle it) it might have become, and in part it did become, a philosophy of communion with Nature, intellectual as well as sensitive, enlarged and made stable by the whole architecture of a species of Platonism. That, however, was too little for Wordsworth as his thought approached maturity. Soon after he reached the legal age of manhood he was seized by the conviction, never afterwards relinquished, that there must be human-heartedness, strenuously moralized, in his philosophy. He had to learn from human suffering as well as from fells and sedge and brooks and celandines; and he did learn much from France in her hour of emancipation—'Bliss was it in that hour to be alive, But to be young was very heaven'—although he later became very nearly a reactionary in matters political. Accordingly his natural piety attempted to include and not to be overlaid by this human-hearted and moral prospect. The result could not in intention have been less than a cosmic philosophy. It need not have been distinctively Christian. But Wordsworth *was* a Christian, and in some measure a Christian theologian and Christian moralist, much as Milton was, the Milton whom Wordsworth revered as the divinest of all English poets. So Wordsworth was a Christian, and a Christian Platonist and a Nature-worshipper all together.

Much in this general philosophy—for the poetry of it should not obscure the fact that it *is* a general philosophy—is woven into the pattern of the famous ode *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, and into many others of Wordsworth's poems which accept the same order of conceptions without, for the most part, developing them so far. For Wordsworth the dominant meaning of 'immortality' was not personal survival—although that, in some sort, might be a consequence—

but the status of eternity, immutability, infinitude—in two words, *Deus fio*. Indeed, it is a doctrine of obliviscence rather than of progress and futurity, although there is hope that the loss may be (as it should be) regained. The 'motion fromwards' is more visible than the 'motion towards'. Anyone who compares Wordsworth's handling of these conceptions with Plato's in the *Meno* or with Vaughan's Platonic handling of a similar theme must be struck by the emphasis upon rediscovery in Plato and in Vaughan, upon increasing forgetfulness in Wordsworth.

The ode itself is a consistent, well-argued philosophical thesis whose purport can be excusably misunderstood only by those who forget the argument through joy in the felicities of the poem's harmonies and in the excitement of its imagery. Let us note the main contention.

The pith of it is that meadow, grove and stream were to us in the springtime of our childhood, not as they later seemed, but hallowed with the consecrated glory and celestial aura inevitable for eyes that so recently had been accommodated to the vision in heaven itself. That, however, is a fugitive consecration, and it tends to vanish altogether as life's sordid business takes hold on us.

The youth who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended.
At length the man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

Where, then, is there room for a lively hope? In the fact that this early but fugitive consecration, this dwindling legacy and fading nostalgia of the brighter realms from whence we came, does not, or at least need not perish utterly and may be partially recovered by a wise and pensive thoughtfulness, in short by a Christian philosophy. Hence our 'obstinate questionings Of sense and outward things, Fallings from us, vanishings' are our life-line to eternity, to the recovery of our intransient status, and

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though they be but shadowy recollections are yet 'the fountain light of all our day' and 'the master light of all our seeing'.

Therefore

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind,
In the primal sympathy
Which, having been, must ever be,
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering,
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

So that

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

As a final piece of commentary I shall attempt to bring certain passages together which are congruent with the theme of the *Immortality Ode*, although not all of them put the emphasis upon obliviscence, several being prospective rather than retrospective. Each, however, is a development of the conviction that

{ What came from Heaven to Heaven by nature clings
And if dissevered thence, its course is short.

{ As one might expect, baptism is said to

Recall the wandering soul to sympathy
With what man hopes from heaven yet fears from earth.

and angels, in latish verses of the date 1833, are said to bless the bed of a new-born child:

Ministers of grace divine
Feelingly their brows incline
O'r this seeming Castaway
Breathing in the light of day
Something like the faintest breath
That has power to baffle death.

Similarly, we have the general statement:

Earth prompts, heaven urges; let us seek the light
 Studious of that pure intercourse begun
 When first our infant brows their lustre won;
 So like the Mountain may we grow more bright
 From unimpeded converse with the sun
 At the approach of all-involving night.

And in the *Evening Ode* 'composed upon an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty' we have the same general thesis as in the *Immortality Ode* except in so far as the thought of the piece, sometimes, is of a *recurrent* 'intimation' as often as nature apparels herself with unusual lustre. On this evening of extraordinary splendour, the glory was

Endued with power to stay
 And sanctify one closing day
 That frail mortality may see
 What is? ah no, but what *can* be.

The poet reflects that time was when 'choirs of fervent angels sang Their vespers in the grove'. These times were gone, yet

Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal eve,
 But long as god-like wish or hope divine
 Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe
 That this magnificence is wholly thine:
 From worlds not quickened by the sun
 A portion of the gift is won:
 An intermingling of heaven's pomp is spread
 On grounds which British shepherds tread.

In the end we have the same tale as in the *Immortality Ode*:

Such hues from their celestial urn
 Were wont to stream before mine eye,
 Where'er it wandered in the morn
 Of blissful infancy,
 The glimpse of glory why renewed?

If aught unworthy be my choice,
 from THEE if I would swerve.

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Oh! let thy grace remind me of the light
Full early lost and fruitlessly deplored
Which, at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored.
My soul though yet confined to earth
Rejoices in a second*birth.

The note of recurrent manifestation is often struck, not only when there are purpureal scenes of natural splendour, but also when there are humbler natural felicities. In such cases, however, we are counselled to become again as little children or at least to de-intellectualize our mentality into a childlike condition of primitive feeling. There is no entrance *nisi sub persona infantis*.

Thus in *The Excursion*, at the opening of Book ix, the Wanderer says:

Ah! Why in age
Do we revert so fondly to the walks
Of childhood?—but that there the soul discerns
The dear memorial footsteps unimpaired
Of her own native vigour; thence can hear
Reverberations; and a choral song
Commingling with the incense that ascends
Undaunted, toward the imperishable heavens
From her own lonely altar.

And in *The Prelude* (Book II) we read:

For I would walk alone
Under the quiet stars, and at that time
Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
To breathe an elevated mood, by form
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand
If the night blackened with a coming storm
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power:
And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation; not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,

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Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity; whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
Have something to pursue.

In this last passage we have a very careful psychological description, too meticulous perhaps to remain poetical, but informative at the very least.

In the poem addressed to the evening star Wordsworth's thought was distinctively different. Indeed, the poem began with an express repudiation of similitude either to the 'motion towards' or to the 'motion fromwards':

It is no spirit who from heaven hath flown
And is descending on his embassy;
Nor traveller gone from earth the heavens to espy.

Hesperus, that 'most ambitious star', shone alone in the sky for a brief season just after sundown. Moral: Hesperus shone perpetually though, near this little planet, he could not compete with our garish sun when that orb had its local supremacy. Hence, said Wordsworth:

While I gazed, there came to me a thought
That I might step beyond my natural race
As thou seem'st now to do; might one day trace
Some ground not mine; and, strong her strength above,
My soul, an apparition in the place,
Tread there, with steps that no one shall reprove!

Very frequently, however, as was only to be expected since men, in the last analysis, are nearly always futurists however sedulously pensive and reminiscent they may try to be, Wordsworth was more of an aspiring than of an obliviscent being. In such moods, it was his endeavour to 'learn to make Time the father of wise hope', to 'confide in more than we can know', to

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'feel that we are greater than we know' and to reach the condition of

One in whom persuasion and belief
Had ripened into faith, and faith become
A passionate intuition.

or of one who, having 'pondered true equality',

May walk
The fields of earth with gratitude and hope.

It is very seldom indeed that a merely naturalistic mood finds deliberate utterance in Wordsworth, though even that may happen, and did happen when he concluded an early enthusiastic poem on the French Revolution with the lines:

Not in Utopia, subterranean fields
Or some secreted island, heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us—the place where in the end
We find our happiness or not at all.¹

Moreover, as we have seen and may now repeat, there was an anti-naturalistic vein in Wordsworth, a vein in which not blood but ichor ran:

Our destiny, our being's heart and home
Is with infinitude and only there.

We seek nothing less than

The head and mighty paramount of truths,
Immortal life in never fading worlds.

Groves, isles and domes

Though clad in colours beautiful and pure
Find in the heart of man no natural home;
The immortal mind craves objects that endure;
These cleave to it, from these it cannot roam
Nor they from it; their fellowship is secure;

¹ Lines which Shelley treated so bitterly in his *Pater Bell the Third*.

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and our love must be

A love allowed to climb
Even on this earth above the reach of time.

'Time's forlorn humanities' and 'all the fuming vanities of earth' are not nearly enough.

Indeed, all natural things are only

Characters of the Great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of eternity,
Of first and last and midst and without end.

That, some may think, is a transcendence and also a wilful eclipse of 'natural piety'. Thinking so, they may have a greater reverence for 'nature's old felicities', and admire in Wordsworth what they revere in St Francis of Assisi.

Chapter VII

SHELLEY'S METAPHYSICS

IN HER NOTE ON *The Revolt of Islam* Mrs Shelley says that her husband excelled both in 'brilliant imagination' and in 'logical exactness of reason', that he had long deliberated whether poetry or metaphysics should be his life's work, and that, choosing poetry, he had intentionally starved his philosophical bent. She adds that the choice was largely illusory since Shelley, by nature, was more of a poet than of a philosopher.

In broad outline there is every reason for accepting most of this story. A man with Shelley's genius for lyric poetry could not be ignorant of that genius, and could scarcely be expected to apply himself with equal diligence to the laborious business of precise analysis and careful dialectic. But Shelley was also a philosopher, and, more narrowly, a metaphysician. Two of his major poems, *Epipsychidion* and *Prometheus Unbound*, are in intention metaphysical poems, the first giving his pneumatology or philosophy of mind, the second being cosmological. There is intense metaphysics in some of his shorter pieces, such as his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, to say nothing of the shyer, less resolute speculation that abounds in nearly all his verse, and his prose writings, such as his *Philosophical View of Reform* and, in chief, his *Defence of Poetry*, show that he required of himself and strenuously attempted to give a philosophy of the vision that was in him, a philosophy, too, which remembered the schools and was much too serious to be Ariel's private adventure. As he said himself in his preface to the *Revolt of Islam*, he seldom aimed at any lesser thing than the assembling of all those elements which essentially compose a Poem in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality'. His clue, ultimately, was very simply expressed by his own Julian in *Julian and Maddalo*:

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“Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek
But in our mind? And if we were not weak
Should we be less in deed than in desire?”

On the other hand, Shelley was too much of a metaphysician to be content with a mere recipe for the salutary and joyful readjustment of some private mind. He demanded a cosmic foundation for his ‘liberal and comprehensive morality’.

“In his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, written when he was twenty-four, and therefore mature as poetical maturity goes, Shelley finds the supreme mystery in the apparent fact that a man who has discerned beauty is *not* immortal and omnipotent, in the enigma, ‘why aught should fail and fade that once is shown’. As a boy, he said, he had looked for ghosts and had ‘called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed’, having been misled into seeking the ‘frail spells’ of vulgar religion, into substituting ‘Demon, Ghost and Heaven’ for the Loveliness which is the true fountain of all that abides. Then the shadow of this Loveliness fell upon him. He vowed eternal allegiance to it, and to all the life and kindness that was latent in it. Did he not keep the vow? Had he not approached understanding as his mental stature grew?”

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn and a lustre in its sky
Which through the summer is not heard or seen
As if it could not be, as if it had not been.

Shelley's general argument in his *Defence of Poetry* may be stated thus: There is a narrower and also a wider sense of ‘poetry’. In the narrower sense, a poem employs ‘measured language’, ‘uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound’, an ‘echo of the eternal music’; yet even in the narrower sense the vulgar distinction between poetry and prose is mistaken. Shakespeare, Dante and Milton were ‘philosophers of the very loftiest powers’.

(/In its broader (which is also its deeper) sense poetry is *making*, poesis, creative mind work and therefore (according to Shelley) imagination. In one sense the imagination is mimetic, for it imitates the 'universal, ideal and sublime'. In another sense it is origina^{ti}ve. 'The functions of the poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange these according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good.' It is no great matter whether it 'spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things'. In either case it 'creates for us a being within our being.'//

What is meant by the 'universal, the ideal and sublime' appears by various marks. 'A poem', we are told, is 'the creator of actions according to the unchangeable face of human nature as existing in the mind of the creator which is itself the image of all other minds.' 'Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.' Under its guidance 'the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal perfection and energy which everyone feels to be the internal type of all that he loves and admires and would become'. By its means 'an exalted calm' may be carried 'into the tumult of familiar life'. It may even 'divest' error and sin of much that is worst in them.

According to Shelley, the imagination produced harmony by 'internal adjustment' and showed its power, as much as anywhere, in the fashioning of institutions and of civilizations. 'Poets', he said at the close of the essay, 'are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'//Since 'a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth', this inventive fashioning of human culture is akin to the inner life and movement of all things, that is (for Shelley) the movement of benign love, constituting 'pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, and love in the intercourse of kind'//The poet, by idealizing manners and opinions, both expresses their cosmic essence and moulds the

processes through which 'life echoes the eternal music' which is its prop and stay and goal. It also 'tempers this planetary music for mortal ears'. 'A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom.'

Despite his avowed and obvious indebtedness to Plato, Shelley denied that 'reason' was included in such imaginative poesis, regarding 'reason' as a mere calculator and itemizer. This was manifestly indefensible on his part. Reason may be and is synoptic, euryplastic. Science and philosophy are indispensable to the fashioning of a wise civilization. They have the very office that Shelley would have denied them. It seems to be clear, however, that Shelley's objection was only to *certain* unpoetic philosophers and reasoners, and that his censure had important reservations even in their case.

This is confirmed by other statements from his pen. In his poem *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley, dismayed at the sorry spectacle of hurrying, scurrying men who 'pursued their serious folly as of old' and at their readiness to continue to be the dupes of 'lawyers, statesmen, priest and theorist', expressly exempted all (or nearly all) of Plato and of Bacon from the condemnation, and saw in the tortured, disfigured shade of Rousseau the image of what might have been true civility if Napoleon's aberration into barbarism had not ruined the hopeful dawn that preceded the French Revolution.

A light of heaven whose half-extinguished beam
Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers for ever sought, for ever lost.

Again, Shelley began his *Philosophical View of Reform*, an essay first printed in the present century¹ and partially looted by its author for the benefit of his *Defence of Poetry*, with an extensive philosophical introduction about the philosophy of civilization. In it he says that 'Bacon, Spinoza, Hobbes, Boyle, Montaigne regulated the reasoning powers, criticized the history,

¹ By T. W. Rolleston, 1920.

exposed the past errors by illuminating their causes and their connection, and anatomized the inmost nature of social man. Then with less interval of time than of genius, followed Locke and the philosophers of his exact and intelligible but superficial school.'¹ A few pages later he asked the rhetorical question: 'What would Swift and Bolingbroke and Sidney and Locke and Montesquieu, or even Rousseau, not to speak of political philosophers of our own age, Godwin and Bentham, have been but for Lord Bacon, Montaigne and Spinoza, and the other great luminaries of the preceding epoch?''²

In short, Shelley had a place for Locke, Hume, Gibbon and others whom he regarded as minor philosophers, calculating and itemizing in the light supplied by greater philosophical luminaries. They were 'correct, popular, simple and energetic'³ he said. Moreover, his references to these philosophers of the Enlightenment have a further connection with our present topic. In his notes to *Queen Mab*, as in the pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism* which led to his expulsion from University College in Oxford, Shelley had argued from unmistakably Lockian premises with a vigour and clarity that any fair-minded tutor (had such existed) would have allowed to be evidence of distinct metaphysical promise. The reconciliation of the empiricist Locke with the rationalist Plato can never have been an easy task; but Shelley, whose heart and mind rejoiced in *all* the senses, not merely in some, and in the intellect besides, had to effect that very reconciliation. How he effected it may never be entirely clear, but it is a fair conjecture that his mind worked along the lines of a contemporary philosopher whom he admired,⁴ namely, Sir William Drummond, in his *Academical Questions* (1805). In that work, learned when judged by contemporary standards, shrewd and still readable, Drummond developed an anti-materialistic phenomenalism which must have encouraged anyone who, like Shelley, was anxious to draw the boundaries between reality and illusion

¹ p. 8.² p. 10.³ p. 8.⁴ See his first note to *Queen Mab*, vii, 'There is no God'.

in unusual and unexpected places, and to find in mind a key that unlocked all doors. Again, Drummond did not despair of the possibility of building a bridge between Locke and Plato. Indeed, in a prominent place, namely, in a footnote to his preface, he remarked: 'I cannot, indeed, comprehend any thing, which is neither a sensation nor obtained from one: I do not, however, on that account, deny the existence of divine and intelligible ideas, as these were explained by Plato to be possible.'¹

From these general reflections it seems most fitting to proceed at once to Shelley's chief metaphysical poems, and first to the *Epipsychidion*.

This poem, Shelley warned his readers, was not for the multitude:

My song, I fear that thou wilt find but few
Who fitly shall conceive thy reasoning
Of such hard matter dost thou entertain.

His readers, indeed, may be excused if they find the hard matter of the song hidden in

Bright plumes of thought in which arrayed
It oversoared this low or worldly shade.

For the imagery and the tale (such as it is) do not easily soften the hard matter. The theme of the poem is the unity, the literal oneness of love, but the narrative for the most part is dual, the poet being mortal although his Emily is at least half ethereal.

See where she stands. A mortal shape indued
With love, and life, and light, and deity,
And motion which may change but cannot die,
An image of some bright eternity,
A shadow of some golden dream: a Splendour
Leaving the third sphere pilotless.

She, Emily, is love under the guise of womanhood, that is to say, a Form of which even the form of perfect womanhood would be only a partial image, to say nothing of an actual breathing

¹ *Academical Questions*, p. xiv.

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Emily who, at the most, could be only an instance of such a partial form.

In his dreaming youth, the poet tells us, he had sought such an image of loveliness. He had

Questioned every tongueless wind that flew
Over my tower of mourning if it knew
Whither 'twas fled this soul out of my soul.

—this *epipsychidion*. He was seeking his own inner self:

That world within this Chaos, mine and me,
Of which she was the veiled divinity,
The world, I say, of thoughts which worshipped her.

Understandably, but vainly, he sought 'the shadow of the idol of his thought' in mortal scenes. More understandably (he believed) he found in a transfigured woman that immortal somewhat which was also his immortal self:

Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth,
This world of love, this *me*: and into birth
Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart
Magnetic might into its central heart.

The scales had fallen from his eyes. Emily was a 'vestal sister' to whatever of dull mortality remained in him. They would fly together (if, indeed, they were twain) to:

The intense, the deep, the impenetrable
Not mine but me.

seeking a Saturnian bower where

Every motion, odour, beam and tone
With that deep music is in unison:
Which is a soul within the soul—they seem
Like echoes of an ante-natal dream—
It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth and Sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity

.

there

The fountains of our deepest life shall be
 Confused in passion's golden purity
 As mountain springs under the morning Sun
 We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?

and so he continues to muse until the appalling thought reaches him that as well as 'one will, one life, one Heaven, one Hell' there may also be 'one annihilation'.

Psychidion is the diminutive of *psyche*, and the prefix '*epi*' usually denotes something additional—*animula addita*, therefore. Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, however, was very far from being a supernumerary soul-let. It was, for him, the soul of soul, the inner shrine of mind—life. The metaphysics of the poem is that the gross psyche of each of us, as well as the still grosser body, draws its vitality from a deeper source which is not divisible into thee, me and they, and is inseparable from the principle of cosmic graciousness from which beauty, goodness and the true do all proceed. On the whole, however, the cosmic implications of the poem are only touched not pressed. The thought is about human life and the way in which it may be made radiant and fragrant, or, if not about human life, at any rate about a human dream more visionful than visionary. And, as we have seen, there is great plumage of imagery which does not conceal the hard matter altogether but is designed to make us dwell upon it. In such imagery there was no parsimony of the senses:

The light clear element which the isle wears
 Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers
 Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers
 And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep:
 And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
 And dart their arrowy odours through the brain
 Till you might faint with that delicious pain.

There may be a question whether the imagery does not distract more than it enlightens, cozening us into a sort of intellectual lull; but be that as it may, there is no doubt at all that

Shelley meant the poem to be a manifesto in favour of a certain type of philosophical idealism, Platonic if not precisely Plato's, and among Plato's dialogues likeliest to the *Symposium* which Shelley revered and translated. That mind was king; that Form was strength; that trance and enchantment might reveal more than eyes or ears or calipers; that mind, Form and vision subtly linked together had an over-worldly, super-transitory, deathless status—such views as these were, he thought, disemprisoning, the substance of things loved and sought and seekable. Such disemprisonment might not be enough. The new prospects would have had their own exigencies, their own adamantine walls to rebuke mere caprice. But it was much if it was not quite enough.

In at least one passage in the poem Shelley allowed himself to abuse academic terms. He wrote:

Mind from its object differs most in this:
 Evil from good; misery from happiness:
 The baser from the nobler: the impure
 And frail from what is clear and must endure;

and went on to assert that things that are good suffer no diminution from being enjoyed, all else being diminishable without limit. Such rickety props to a metaphysics can only be condemned. There is no excuse for equating mind's 'object' with that which is despicable; for good can be contemplated as well as evil, that is, be mind's object; and it was so contemplated by Shelley himself, time and again.

Indeed, the lapse is explicable only if one assumes that 'matter' is mind's 'object', that 'matter' is divisible, but that the good does not suffer diminution when a soul participates in it. Such a belief may have been Shelley's metaphysical buttress for his unwearying faith in the inexhaustible bounty of goodness, love and truth. If so, the buttress is not very strong. There is a distinction between goods that have to be rationed and goods which are not distributed in packets. The bounty of a Soup Kitchen illustrates the former, the bounty of the National Gallery (within limits) illustrates the latter; but there is no foundation for the view that

'goods' of the rationed class are really evil and despicable, that goods of the shareable class are always exalted, or, indeed, that the latter class does not contain evils as well as goods. A public execution belongs to the same class as the National Gallery or a sunset.

Let us turn to *Prometheus Unbound*.

Here the cosmological interest preponderates, and the poem must be judged, in part, by its success in that particular. Certainly it would live in its wonderful lyrics, and in the splendour and witchery of its incidentals even if its cosmology were totally incoherent. Nothing can rob it of its greatness; but it is impossible to suppose that Shelley regarded the poem principally as something that should live *despite* its cosmology. He was in earnest with his metaphysics.

Prometheus, according to Shelley's preface, is 'the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends'. In short, he is the principle of perfectibility implicit in the human race, but also a cosmic principle. Jupiter his enemy is depicted as Omnipotence, unloving and unlovely, exploiting the knowledge which Prometheus gave him, but only as loveless power. Cursing Jupiter, Prometheus foretells that it is the Miscreator, Jupiter, not the Titan who must die. As his 'mother' the Earth tells the Titan

Subtle thou art and good and though the gods
Hear not this voice, yet thou art more than God,
Being wise and kind.

In the first act of the poem, Jove does his worst with the Titan. The furies, guided to the Caucasus by an apologetic Mercury, are let loose upon Prometheus. In other words mankind is abandoned to the powers of darkness, to tyranny, superstition, military vain-glory, and stale convention, all the idols which Shelley's philosophy was designed to smash.

Hypocrisy and custom make their minds
The fanes of many a worship now outworn,

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They dare not devise good for man's estate,
And yet they know not that they do not dare.
The good want power but to weep barren tears;
The powerful goodness want, worse need for them;
The wise want love, and those who love want wisdom,
And all best things are thus confused to ill.

Love must be saved from its present desolation. Prometheus withstands the furies, and his steadfastness is saluted in the immortal lyrics in which the magical:

On a poet's lips I slept
Dreaming like a love adept.

is only the first among many peers. There is a better age to come after this fiercest of trials:

Wisdom, Justice, Love and Peace
When they struggle to increase
Are to us, as soft winds be
To shepherd boys a prophecy
Which begins and ends in thee.

So far the cosmology has been rather slender, a pageantry, half-cosmic, half-Caucasian, designed to illustrate the genial doctrine that knowledge is indomitable if only it be kind and that loveless power is always hateful. Even so, however, the figure of Jupiter is quite desperately perplexing. As a Moloch, as Jahwe in his fiercer moods, he is conceivable enough, being just a magnified, non-natural human tyrant: but Shelley was essaying a sterner metaphysics, more nearly naked, and was attempting, in an absolute way, to set forth the thesis that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. What *was* Jove's omnipotence as depicted in this poem? A temporary omnipotence doomed to perish? An omnipotence weak, trembling and afraid? An omnipotence that was cruel because it was aware of its weakness? What sort of omnipotence is that? Even if the cosmic notion of *temporary* omnipotence were tenable, an omnipotence which sprang up *ex nihilo* and from no causes, which collapsed

in nihilum also from no causes, the notion of a *defeated* omnipotence is a plain absurdity and so is the notion of a restricted omnipotence which breaks against the Titan's will. Christian theologians have found unending perplexities in their defence of the proud attribute of omnipotence. Did Shelley's etiolated Christianity, did his airier hyper-theism avoid any of them? Did it not manufacture more?

For the answer to such questions we must go to the second act of the poem where Shelley's cosmology became as definite as he ever made it.

Tremulous in the ecstasy of a rejuvenated earth where all has become a single brotherhood, the Oceanides, Asia and Panthea, reach the portals of Demogorgon's cave, a place of Delphic volcanic mystery whence the depth of truth exudes:

Down, down
Through the shade of sleep,
Through the cloudy strife
Of death and of life,
Through the veil and the bar
Of things which seem and are,
Even to the depths of the remotest throne,
Down, down.

All is vapour and profundity except the unalterable truth that love and meekness must triumph.

The Oceanides put questions to Demogorgon at that spirit's request. They are told that 'God' made the world and man's mind, and that 'merciful God' made the springtime and loving hearts. Who then sent evil, pain, hate, despair and 'self-contempt bitterer to drink than blood'? Demogorgon at his most oracular replies 'He reigns', naming no names, and shields himself behind the same formula for many similar questions. The persistent Asia, however, declines to be put off, and tells Demogorgon, like a Highland minister in his prayers, precisely what past cosmology has been. First, she says, there were Heaven and Earth, light and love, then Saturn's reign 'from whose throne Time fell, an envious

shadow'. In Saturnian shadow-time, however, knowledge and love were denied to 'the primal spirits'. Theirs was the desolation of innocence and of ignorance. Then Prometheus gave knowledge to Jove, and Jove's Omnipotence wrought calamities untold. Prometheus defied him and he trembled. Does Jupiter then reign? Is he not a slave too?

Demogorgon becomes more communicative. Any spirit is a slave, he admits, who serves things evil. The inference in Jupiter's case—Demogorgon names him now—must be plain to Asia. Jupiter has just a leased or lent and temporary supremacy over living things. For the rest, Demogorgon's references to 'God' were adapted to the questioner's mind. 'Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change' were beyond oracular divulging. 'The deep truth is imageless.' Asia, very quick in her intellectuals, infers that each mind must be its own oracle; but Demogorgon informs her, quite explicitly, that the hour of deliverance has come. ✓

In short, Demogorgon usually pleads an oracle's privilege as he was entitled to do. We may perhaps infer that, to Shelley's mind, what his singing fauns called

These wise and lovely songs
Of fate, and chance and God and chaos old

can never be straight metaphysics. On the other hand, much that Demogorgon said to Asia was direct and uncompromising, and the events in the third act of the poem should have had a certain similitude to reason and sense, even if they have also to be accepted *per speculum in aenigmate*. Briefly, these events were that Demogorgon, calling himself eternity—'demand no direr name'—dragged Jupiter down to an abyss of darkness which swallowed them both. He described himself as Jupiter's child, born to overthrow him, as Jupiter in his turn had overthrown his parent Saturn—a type of cosmic genealogy which may indeed be patterned on the antique but defies all philosophy, even the crudest.

There is relatively little cosmological metaphysics in the rest

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of the poem. Hercules, releasing Jupiter, was at most a demi-god, a minor figure in the cosmic scene; and, in the last act, the rejuvenated earth was given over to Apollo who did not pretend to omnipotence or even to being a Creator in a big way:

list I hear
The small, clear, silver lute of the young Spirit
That sits i' the morning star.

From this account of Shelley's major metaphysical pieces, and with some help from some of his other poems we may, I think, fairly describe his general metaphysical position somewhat as follows: First, he retained the conviction he expressed in *Queen Mab*:

Throughout this varied and eternal world
Soul is the only element;

and soul is mind. Second, he took mind to be universal. As he said in *Prometheus Unbound*:

Man, Oh! not men. A chain of linked thought
Of love and might to be divided not.

and again in the same poem:

Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul
Whose nature is its own divine control.

This, in the third place, he believed to be what ancient Greece had taught the world. Thus in *Hellas* he said:

Greece and her foundations are
Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystalline sea
Of thought and its eternity.

Fourthly, and more in detail, he put his trust in a species of Platonic idealism construed as plastic imagination animated and controlled by the Forms in whose vitality beauty, truth and goodness were intermingled, strong, clear, bright, gracious and kind. Fifthly, he believed that these Forms were the ultimate foundations of the cosmos, having the splendours of sense for their attendants and ministering angels. Hence they must prevail

over kings, priests, plutocrats, venal philosophers, vacillating commercial politicians (like the British) and other such mis-guiders. They had the status of deathlessness, of regnant eternity. Sixthly, and as a consequence, the vulgar distinction between the real and the seeming, the permanent and the passing, the dominant and the destructible had to be radically reinterpreted.

(I shall end this essay by drawing widely from Shelley's poems for a somewhat fuller account of his views upon some of these metaphysical matters.)

The influence of the Forms and their mode of action (if efficacious they be) is so unlike our modern conceptions of action and power that mythopoeic suggestion is at least as likely to succeed as deliberate analysis. In such suggestion Shelley excelled. Take these lines from *Prometheus*:

And lovely apparitions, dim at first,
Then radiant, as the mind, arising bright
From the embrace of beauty, whence the forms
Of which these are the phantasms, cast on them
The gathered rays which are reality,
Shall visit us, the progeny immortal
Of Painting, Sculpture and rapt Poesy
And arts, though unimagined, yet to be.
The wandering voices and the shadows these
Of all that man becomes, the mediators
Of that best worship love, by him and us
Given and returned; swift shapes and sounds, which grow
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind
And veil by veil evil and error fall.

For Shelley, however, as for many other Platonists, 'un-veiling' was not confined to evil and error. He was ready to apply it to 'life' itself as in the familiar opening lines of one of his sonnets:

Lift not the painted veil which those who live
Call life: though unreal shapes be painted there
And it but mimic all we would believe
With colours idly spread.¹

¹ Cf., almost verbally, *Prometheus*, end of Act III.

The same thought recurs in *Adonais* (where, however, the physics of the metaphor are not encouraging):

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

the immediate inference there being that only the past, the dead, is utterly imperturbable.

Other reflections, however, are also permissible. One is the whimsy in *The Sensitive Plant*:

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be
Like all the rest a mockery.

Another is a possible readjustment of the boundaries between sleep and waking as in the last lines of *Marianne's Dream*:

And she walked about as one who knew
That sleep has sights as clear and true
As any waking eye can view.

A third and more radical way of thinking was expressed by the Wandering Jew Ahasuerus in his strange interview with Mahmud in *Hellas*:

Mistake me not. All is contained in each,
Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
Is that which has been, or will be, to that
Which is—the absent to the present. Thought
Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
They are, what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms,
Empires and superstitions. What has thought
To do with time or place or circumstance?

It is the business of a metaphysician, plying his trade, to examine what he means by 'eternity', and to suggest, if he cannot wholly explain, how 'eternity' can emit yet control time and the

mutable. A metaphysical poet, deploying his resources imaginatively, may have wider room for manoeuvre than other metaphysicians who attempt a staid argumentative advance. Still the leading ideas of both must be substantially similar.

A common, and, I think, the worst way of setting about this business is in effect to leave eternity and mutability side by side, contrasting them, and heaping laudatory epithets upon the former. Shelley, like so many others, sometimes succumbed to this evasion. It is the theme, for instance, of his lines to *Mont Blanc* where the Ravine of Arve—'thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale'—is a dizzying procession of ghosts and phantoms and so is contrasted with the eternal mountain itself:

All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
Remote, serene, and inaccessible.

Indeed, in this particular poem, the poet's mind, at any rate in the sense of 'his separate phantasy, His own, his human mind', is allowed to be mutable and subordinate, something less than

the secret strength of things
Which govern thought, and to the infinite dome
Of heaven is as a law.

For the most part, however, Shelley was not and could not be content with the contrast between tranquil, motionless, eternal power on the one hand and, on the other, that which moved swiftly and was gone. (In a passage already quoted from *Epipsychidion* he spoke of 'motion which may change but cannot die'. His spirit, so sensitive to the felicities of motion, was certain to look for a moving deathlessness. Such a metaphysics is not unpromising. It is the attempt to find constancy and dependability in change instead of an unchanging constancy side by side with change, to explore something more radical than Plato's suggestion that time was 'the moving image of eternity', i.e. was the mimic of eternity because 'time' was *measured*,

harmonious, astronomical change but was only a mimic because it moved and so *did* change. While it seems to be impossible, by any alchemy, to elude the fact that the past *has passed* and therefore is over and done with, it is not impossible, nevertheless, to look with Heracleitus for law, constancy and security in the process of coming-to-be and of passing-away.

One of the most elaborate of Shelley's attempts to display this conception occurs in the last Act of *Prometheus*, Panthea being the speaker. She describes:

A sphere which is as many thousand spheres,
Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,
Purple and azure, white and green and golden,
Sphere within sphere; and every space between
Peopled with unimaginable shapes,
Such as ghosts dream dwell in the lampless deep,
Yet each inter-transparent, and they whirl
Over each other with a thousand motions
Upon a thousand sightless axles spinning
And with the force of self-destroying swiftness
Intensely, slowly, solemnly roll on,
Kindling with mingled sounds and many tones
Intelligible words and music wild.
With mighty whirl the multitudinous orb
Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety like light:
And the wild odour of the forest flowers,
The music of the living grass and air,
The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
Round the intense yet self-conflicting speed
Seem kneaded into one aerial mass
Which drowns the sense.

In this passage there is not only an account of the constant pattern or 'eternity' of measured motion but also of its union with the senses in a fashion much more philosophical than the 'painted veil'. The sketch, so elaborate in some of its parts, may

be very vague in others; but it is Shelley's attempt to combine what, being himself, he had to try to combine.

Shelley's poems evince very little interest in personal or human 'immortality' in any sense in which personal pre-existence or survival is prominent, although the thought of decay or of annihilation distressed him and although, in *Hellas*, he said regarding pre-existence:

Yet wouldst thou commune with
That portion of thyself which was ere thou
Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death.

The reason is obvious. 'Immortality' for him meant super-temporal status, *natura naturans*, the status of Forms. To speak of the time or the manner of acquisition of such a status, whether at the moment of death or at any other time, is to confuse the temporal with the super-temporal. Negatively we are often assured that the super-temporal does not perish, but that is the limit of our knowledge in this kind.

\ A brief reference to *Adonais* may suffice for illustration. That poem, although Greek-romantic not Christian-romantic, follows the familiar pattern of a funeral march in Western Christendom. There are grateful tears for the past, then doom and the pit, then triumph. The triumph is a triumph of transfiguration. *Adonais* is 'made one with nature':

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear.

He joins the inheritors of unfulfilled renown 'far in the Unapparent'. Since the Unapparent is also the timeless, it is not surprising if such statements defy all calendars, but if we insisted upon asking when Keats (or when some *animula* in Keats) attained this transfigured status, the appropriate answer would surely be 'When he began to make loveliness more lovely'. But all the emphasis is on:

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That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst.

If, finally, anyone should ask why it is important to study Shelley's metaphysics closely when his pages are so full of delight for those who are not metaphysical, there are, I think, two principal answers. In the first place it is neither sensible nor even excusable to try to appreciate an author without taking seriously what the author himself took seriously. In the second place, it is imprudent to forget that Shelley took his metaphysics seriously for reasons which have a wide appeal in quarters in which the name of metaphysics is seldom heard. He was passionately in earnest with his 'liberal and comprehensive morality', with his visions for the regeneration of mankind and its civilizations. There are some who think that such visions are only human, applying to men's heart and conscience and to nothing else, surviving only so long as men can make a shift to control their destinies in an insignificant half-friendly planet. There are others who think little or nothing of morality without religion, little or nothing of mere men without a cosmic or a theological backing for the human spirit. Shelley belonged to the very large class which refuses to put its trust in a temporary, precarious, merely planetary humanism. He differed from many in the class, partly because his refusal was witting, partly because he rejected the traditional theologies on which these others so often relied. Therefore he had to be a self-conscious metaphysician.

Chapter VIII

PHILOSOPHY IN THE WORKS OF DICKENS

THIS ESSAY is, in part, an attempt to appease my conscience. The late G. F. Stout, one of the few deservedly eminent British philosophers of his generation, once remarked to me in conversation that there was a great deal of excellent philosophy in Dickens—a philosophy well worth examining seriously and in detail. I assented; but chiefly from policy, having, at the time, little in my mind to justify the assent except some wisecracks from the mouths of such unprofessional logicians as Sam Weller and Sairey Gamp. Stout was a tough opponent in argument, using his deafness very adroitly. It was best to be sure of one's ground. I am still pretty doubtful whether Dickens was much of a philosopher, more doubtful, indeed, after inquiry, than I was at the time of this conversation with Stout. Still the point is worth investigating, and if I could induce some of the innumerable lovers of Dickens to support Stout's view and quench my doubts about it, I should be very well content.

(/Dickens did not use the word 'philosophy' or the word 'metaphysics' very often, but he did use them occasionally; and something, though not very much, can be gleaned from his mention of them by name.)

The *locus classicus* comes from the mouth of Mr Wackford Squeers, although it must be confessed that Mr Squeers was tipsy at the time and was talking for talking's sake to the deaf old hag Peg Sliderskew with the ulterior object of purloining a document in a friendly atmosphere:

'Measles, rheumatics, hooping-cough, fevers, agers and lumbagers', said Mr Squeers, 'is all philosophy together; that's what it is. The heavenly bodies is philosophy, and the earthly bodies is philosophy. If there's a screw loose in a heavenly body, that's philosophy, and if there's a screw loose in a earthly body that's philosophy too; or it may

be that sometimes there's a little metaphysics in it, but that's not often. Philosophy's the chap for me. If a parent asks a question in the classical, commercial or mathematical line, says I gravely, "Why, sir, in the first place, are you a philosopher?"—"No Mr Squeers," he says, "I an't." "Then, sir," says I, "I am sorry for you, for I shan't be able to explain it." Naturally the parent goes away, and wishes he was a philosopher, and, equally naturally, thinks I'm one.'

Here we have the contrast between experimental and humanistic philosophy and also an undeveloped reference to metaphysics.

There is no need to examine Dickens's views about experimental philosophy, i.e. about natural science. His 'unbelieving philosophers' and 'unbelieving chemists' in *A Tale of Two Cities* are a sufficient indication. They were not the chaps for him. As he said in his *Uncommercial Traveller*, he 'travelled for the great house of Human Interest Brothers and had rather a large connection in the fancy goods way'. Again, it seems unnecessary to do more than note the sort of general 'philosophical' observations about human nature that anyone might make anywhere. 'Rum creeturs is women', said the dirty-faced man. 'Lord! What *does* it matter after all?' said Mrs Jarley. 'Philosopher sir?' asked Mr Jingle. 'An observer of human nature, sir', said Mr Pickwick. 'Ah, so am I. Most people are when they've little to do and less to get.'

Similarly, the reflections of Dickens's characters described as 'philosophical', for instance the 'philosophies' of Mr Chester and of Eugene Wrayburn, are not of much significance, and Mrs Chick's occasional outbursts, such as 'Change! Why, my gracious me what is there that does *not* change?' need not delay us. Again, we need not linger too long over the philosophy of female America¹ in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The 'lady on the right of Mrs Brick' attended lectures on the Philosophy of Crime on Tuesdays, on the Philosophy of Vegetables on Fridays, and employed the other days of the week, Sundays excepted,

¹ Female England could be illustrated by Mrs Witterly.

similarly. Mrs Hominy had formidable philosophical leanings, and so had the literary ladies Miss Toppit and Miss Codger who introduced themselves to her:

'Mind and matter', said Miss Toppit, 'glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the Sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is.... But then outlaughes the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grôtesque, "What ho! Arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here!" And so the vision fadeth.'

Two points may be noted, however. The first is that Dickens sometimes meant *Laissez-faire* egoists when he spoke about 'philosophers'; I shall discuss this matter later. The second is that Dickens sometimes took 'philosophy' to mean what was then called 'the philosophy of mind', that is to say, a sort of speculative psychology closely connected with the association of ideas.¹ Dick Swiveller, for example, was said to have approached 'the philosophy of dreams' when he remarked that dream-coughs and dream-sneezes were quite outside his experience. Again Mrs Tickit remarked with a 'philosophic air' that 'dear me! a person's thoughts, however they may stray, will go more or less on what is uppermost in their minds'.

In the main, however, Dickens used the word 'metaphysics' when he meant to describe this kind of psychological philosophy. Even when he seems only to be referring to something monstrous deep, it is nearly always psychological profundity of some kind that warrants the epithet 'metaphysical'. That is clear, say, from what 'the kind man' said to Harriet in *Dombey and Son*:

We go on in our clock-work routine, from day to day and can't make out or follow these changes [*in the character of our acquaintances*]. They—they are a metaphysical sort of thing. We—we haven't leisure for it. We—we haven't courage. They're not taught at schools or colleges, and we don't know how to set about it. In short we are so darned business-like.

For the most part there is no doubt at all that 'metaphysics', for Dickens, meant deliberate introspection and/or theory of know-

¹ Mrs Nickleby and Flora Finching are admirable examples of minds working almost entirely on the associative level.

ledge. Mr Tigg's 'strong metaphysical interest' in his friend Mr Chevy Slyme's weaknesses in the matter of loans purported to be simply the interest of a curious psychologist. When Pip in *Great Expectations* was miserable and could not explain his feelings to himself, his case, described as a 'case for metaphysics', was, quite simply, an introspective trouble. When Mr Parker, contradicting old John Willet of *The Maypole*, 'got into metaphysics without exactly seeing his way out of them', the trouble was that Willet, professing to have the evidence of his senses, had only the presumptions of his common sense. When Mr Pecksniff said that Chuffey 'metaphysically speaking' was a dummy he was speaking as an amateur alienist.

But let us abandon the *words* 'philosophy' and 'metaphysics' in Dickens's pages and turn to the things by whatever name he called them.

A possible method, and, I suspect, the method Stout himself would have chosen, is to search Dickens's pages for aphorisms, especially among the wisecracks of those who like Bailey junior 'hoped they knowed wot o'clock it wos in ginerall', and so to make a patchwork that might reveal a pattern.

In this way one might 'contemplate existence' like Mr Pecksniff and extract a good deal of general philosophy. Monistic philosophers, for instance, should appreciate Mr Curdle upon the unities, 'a completeness—a kind of a universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time—a sort of a general oneness, if I may be allowed to use so strong an expression'. Realistic philosophers would admire Mrs Gamp's 'facts bein' stubborn and not easy drove'. Logistical philosophers might or might not commend Sam Weller's illustration of a self-evident proposition—'as the dog's meat man said when the housemaid told him he warn't a gentleman'—and amuse themselves with analysing Cousin Feenix's statement concerning 'this world which is remarkable for devilish strange things and for being decidedly the most unintelligible thing within a man's experience'. There would be general agreement with Mr Wilfer that 'What might have been

is not what is', and with Mr Boffin that 'Everything that begins at all must begin at some time.'

It would also be easy to collect a great assemblage of observations upon 'life'. 'Upon my soul and body it's the queerest thing altogether', said Mr Montague Tigg before he became Mr Tigg Montague. There is Mr Boffin's celebrated remark when Mrs Boffin opined that the world was wide enough for all of us. 'So it is, my dear, when not literary. But when so, not so.' There is Mark Tapley's: 'We must all be seasoned one way or another. That's religion, that is, you know.' There is Mrs Gamp's verdict upon Bailey junior: 'He was born into a wale; and he lived in a wale; and he must take the consequences of sech a sitiuation.' There is Tony Weller upon matrimony:

Ven you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it's vorth goin' through so much to learn so little, as the charity boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter of taste. *I* rayther think it isn't.

This method, however, is apt to have rather a short journey from scrap heap to scrap book, if, indeed, it does not return to the scrap heap. It seems better to try some other way.

As I remarked earlier, Dickens sometimes meant by 'philosophy' something very specialized indeed. He meant the 'philosophy' of mere self-interest, supposedly enlightened, associated with the doctrine of the 'economic man' and with the names of Bentham and Malthus. (Indeed, Mr Sapsea in *Edwin Drood* produced a parody of Bentham's greatest happiness principle. Mr Gradgrind in *Hard Times* inveighed incessantly against 'utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of fact, genteel and used up infidels, gobblers of many little dog's-eared creeds'.)

As might be expected, Dickens had nothing but scorn for such a social philosophy. The Poor Law and the Factory Acts were anathema to him; and he wrote *Oliver Twist* for the express castigation of 'philosophers'. It was they who would grind the faces of the poor, they who stiffened the parsimony of the Work-

house Board and resented the meddlesomeness of juries inquiring into deaths from exposure. Consider the dialogue between Bumble the beadle and Sowerberry the undertaker (who at heart was rather a decent fellow):

'Juries is ineddicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches.'

'So they are', said the undertaker.

'They haven't no more philosophy nor political economy about 'em than that', said the beadle snapping his fingers contemptuously.

'No more they have', acquiesced the undertaker.

'I despise 'em', said the beadle growing very red in the face.

'So do I', rejoined the undertaker.

Dickens was aware that this 'philosophy of number one' was capable of defending co-operation in what he took to be its own twisted way. In this sense, Fagin was able to advise Noah Claypole that Claypole's number one, for security reasons, would be politic if it amalgamated itself with Fagin's number one. Indeed, Fagin at this point anticipated T. H. Green's doctrine of the identity of the 'true' with the 'universal' self, though he limited the universe to his thieves' kitchen. For the most part, however, Dickens was content to scarify all such philosophical 'selfishness' without himself making any philosophical attempt to examine the basis of egoism. According to *Oliver Twist* all such 'mighty philosophers' were jesuitical casuists in the sense of the term familiar to those who are not jesuits:

Thus to do a great right you may do a little wrong; and you may take any means which the end to be attained will justify; the amount of the right or the amount of the wrong, or indeed the distinction between the two, being left entirely to the philosopher concerned; to be settled by his clear, comprehensive and impartial view of his own particular case.

Indeed, Dickens was so infuriated with these politico-economic philosophers that, rather oddly in view of so many of his sentiments, he encouraged his scorn to find solace in the ridicule of Bentham's darling project of prison reform. As *David Copperfield* winds slowly to its close the egregious Creakle is revealed as a Middlesex magistrate in charge of a model penitentiary where

Heep and Littimer curry sanctimonious favour. In the continental parts of *Little Dorrit* again (for Bentham influenced French philosophy almost as much as English), the melodramatic rogue Rigaud-Blandois creeps into the 'Break of Day' inn at Chalons to hear the landlady vociferously denouncing 'philosophical philanthropy' on the ground that some evil men are fit for nothing but extermination.

As a social reformer, then, Dickens repudiated this type of social philosophy, and most of his own endeavours after social reform were direct attacks upon the abuses which angered him, without overmuch interest in a general, argued basis of philosophy which might show how his projects cohered. His general aim was to puncture British self-complacency and obsequiousness in the hope, above all, of bettering the condition of the poor. More in detail he attacked the poor laws, debtors' prisons, the law's delays and absurdities, commercialism, government methods, bad housing, bad education and other such evils with a supremely effective pen. Always a story-teller of the first rank, he never attempted to conceal his passion for definite reforms.

When Pip went to London to be made a gentleman 'we Britons had particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything'. Another aspect of the same thing was what Mr Meagles described as 'our English holding-on by nonsense after everyone has found it out'. The attitude had its most elaborate expression in the Podsnappery of Mr Podsnap, being there combined with the general philosophy of equating the objectionable with the non-existent. Did not Mr Podsnap say of England?—

This island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.

Such complacent isolationism, in Dickens's pages, was not confined to Mr Podsnap's class. It was just as manifest in the attitude of the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard in Pentonville towards John Baptist Cavaletto as in the Podsnap mansion adjoining Portman Square. It was part of Mrs Emma Micawber's creed, though not of her husband's.

'When our race attains to eminence and fortune, I own I should wish that fortune to flow into the coffers of Britannia.'

'My dear', said Mr Micawber, 'Britannia must take her chance. I am bound to say she has never done much for me, and that I have no particular wish upon the subject.'

'Micawber', returned Mrs Micawber, 'there you are wrong. You are going out Micawber, to this distant clime, to strengthen, not to weaken the connexion between yourself and Albion.'

In the main, however, the attitude was most pronounced in those who had an official or at least an assured status in the Britannic system, from Bumble the beadle and Dennis the hangman upwards. 'Do you call *this* constitootional,' Dennis demanded, 'Do you see him shot through and through instead of being worked off like a Briton?' In the upper circles the statement was usually more elaborate. Consider, for instance, Mr Spenlow's views upon the Prerogative Office of the diocese of Canterbury:

Who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who was the better for it? All the sinecurists. Very well. Then the good predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect; but what he objected to was the insertion of the wedge. Under the Prerogative Office the country had been glorious. Insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office and the country would cease to be glorious. He considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time.

Consider, again, another lawyer, Mr Kenge in *Bleak House*:

We are a great country, Mr Jarndyce, we are a very great country. This is a great system, Mr Jarndyce, and would you wish a great country to have a little system? Now really, really.

British obsequiousness, the deferential attitude of the un-

moneyed to the moneyed together with the complementary condescension of the moneyed, was another aspect of the same thing. Dickens's pictures of high life, it is true, are as inept as his pictures of middle and low life are incomparably skilful. He would have been wiser had he been content to describe the aristocracy after the manner of Miss Henrietta Petowker: 'What do you call it when Lords break off door-knockers, and beat policemen, and play at coaches with other people's money, and all that sort of thing?' What he knew and what he described with genius was the arrogance of the genteel towards the sub-genteel and of the sub-genteel towards the 'low'. We may ignore Mrs Waterbrook, who 'if she had a weakness it was blood', and turn instead to Noah Claypole, the Charity boy, addressing Oliver Twist as 'workus', to Mr Muzzle, butler to Mr Nupkins, making the pantry boy and the kitchen maid dine in the wash'us because they were so 'dreadful vulgar', to the nice grades of parasitism among Mr John Smauker's company of flunkeys at the 'swarry' in Bath, to the hairdresser in *Nicholas Nickleby* who refused to shave anyone meaner than a baker. I do not think that Dickens wanted to abolish all class distinctions, or that he repudiated them in his own case. There is no evidence that when Murdstone, to save his own pocket, put little David Copperfield to work with 'common' boys in a common warehouse, David's shame was other than a weakness of David's character acknowledged at a few places in the book. But if Dickens's satire cut deeper than he thought it did in this matter, it was not the less effective.

As might be expected, the scorn of the sub-genteel for the 'low' was very nearly in inverse ratio to the distance between them. It was Miss Knag, Madame Mantalini's forewoman, who told her brother that his back kitchen couldn't be too damp for his servants to sleep in. 'Those sort of people, I tell him, are glad to sleep anywhere. Heaven suits the back to the burden. What a nice thing to think it should be so, isn't it?' And we have noticed Noah Claypole's attitude. Dickens himself was the defender of the underdog unless, like Bill Sykes, the dog was

irreclaimable. His sympathies were all with the Phil Squods who 'had been throwed, all sorts of styles, all their lives'.

His grounds were compassion and a general philanthropical morality. This I shall discuss later after I have mentioned some of the chief among the particular abuses which Dickens attacked. It should be remarked, however, that scattered incidental descriptions and observations are evidence in this matter as well as set disquisitions. Thus Dickens did not write a novel about unemployment; but he described widespread unemployment in the Black Country when Little Nell and her scamp of a grandfather were wandering in these parts. He did not write a novel about housing conditions as such, or propose a housing scheme. But after one has read about Chinks's Basin, about Jacob's Island, about Tom-All-Alone's, 'a shameful testimony to future ages how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together', about Bleeding Heart Yard, about Mrs 'Brown's' hovel and the like, there is no need for a longer story.

In matters of government, perhaps because of his experience as a reporter, Dickens had no great respect for the House of Commons or for British democracy generally. No doubt, the account of the Eatanswill election need not have been more than simple fooling, Mr Gregsbury's treatment of Mr Pugstyles and his other constituents need not be supposed to be typical of very many M.P.'s, and Mr Twemlow's statement that the House of Commons was 'the best club in London' need not describe more than the attitude of some few Twemlows. On the whole, however, Dickens was allergic to the appeals of British constitutional theory, and his account, in *Little Dorrit*, of the Tite Barnacles and the Stiltstalkings in the Circumlocution Office was a wholly serious attack upon British political administration. Dickens seriously believed (not without evidence) that the Circumlocution Office was a politico-diplomatic 'hocus-pocus piece of machinery for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs', that its Barnacles 'despatch-boxed the compass', that its diplomatic Stiltstalkings were 'noble Refrigerators who have iced several

European courts in their time', and that inventors like Doyce would have their hearts broken long before they could persuade the Office to do anything at all. Ferdinand, the most vivacious of the Barnacles, expressed the matter admirably. 'We must have humbug, we all like humbug, we couldn't get on without humbug. A little humbug, and a groove, and everything goes on admirably if you leave it alone.'

So of the Law. Dickens seems to have thought pretty well of policemen; and his detectives, Mr Inspector and Mr Bucket (not forgetting Mrs Bucket who 'paused at the level of a gifted amateur'), were neither inefficient nor, on the whole, unkind.¹ Even the Bow Street detectives in *Oliver Twist* were pretty shrewd fellows, although Dr Losberne, for the purposes of the story, had to fool them rather easily. By and large, Dickens was not too hard upon magistrates, the trials of Kit Nubbles and of John Dawkins, for instance, being fair enough though *Oliver Twist's* was not. Even Mr Justice Stareleigh was treated not unkindly. Sir Stephen Gazelee, his original, need not have retired, as he did, into private life. But, in general, Dickens, like his own Trooper 'George', 'didn't take kindly to the breed' of lawyers, and he took considerably less kindly to the entire system of the law as he found it in Britain. In criminal law there were the batches of executions described in *Great Expectations*, transportations like Alice Marlow's in *Dombey and Son*, and many other horrors. In civil law there were the ruined lives made dusty by the endless 'wiglomeration' of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Poor mad Miss Flite, one of its ruins, summed up the system very adequately: 'I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment.'

Miss Flite, Richard Carstone, Mr Grindley and the other victims of Jarndyce and Jarndyce were not among the poorest in the land, at any rate until the disputed estate had been entirely

¹ They were much better than amateur detectives like Guppy, Jobling-Weevle and young Smallweed, though Nadgett, the private detective, ran them close.

devoured by the lawyers. Debtors' prisons, however, housed all classes, all to whom anything could be lent at a risk. For Dickens this subject was as urgent as the Poor Laws, and his account of the Fleet in *Pickwick* and of the Marshalsea in *Little Dorrit* was even more detailed than his account of Workhouse conditions in *Oliver Twist* or of poor old Betty Higden's successful but pathetic determination, in *Our Mutual Friend*, never to become and, in particular, never to die a pauper.

If debtors' prisons were ever appropriate residences for anybody they would have been appropriate for Messrs Alfred Jingle and Job Trotter, but even in the case of that precious pair it was impossible to defend a system which implied that spongers should literally starve when they could not sponge any longer upon anyone, not even upon a fellow-debtor unless he happened to be a Pickwick. Sam Weller described the philosophy of the system very thoroughly in his comment on Mr Pickwick's impression that the porter-and-skittles type of debtor did not seem to mind his imprisonment very much:

'Ah, that's just the wery thing, sir,' rejoined Sam, '*they* don't mind it; it a reg'lar holiday to them—all porter and skittles. It's the t'other vuns as gets done over with this sort of thing; them down-hearted fellers as can't svig away at the beer, nor play at skittles neither; them as vould pay if they could, and gets low by being boxed up. I'll tell you wot it is, sir: them as is always a idlin' in public houses it don't damage at all, and them as is always a workin' when they can, it damages too much. "It's unekal" as my father used to say wen his grog worn't made half-and-half—"it's unekal and that's the fault on it."'

In these observations Mr Weller was not only a ready and an acute psychologist, but also a psychologist who was prepared to explore the relations between character and social environment. So was Charles Dickens. The picture of William Dorrit in his twenty years of the Marshalsea was Dickens's most elaborate attempt at such a psychological character study. And so we have the story of the poor man's pathetic rise to pathetic leadership among the

pathetic 'Collegians' of the Marshalsea. We see him in all the shabby dignity of his seniority as all the other debtors either depart or succumb. We note his growing gentility, his mendicancy, pretending to the graceful acceptance of an honorarium which was only his due, his near-blindness to the patent fact that Amy Dorrit, that little gentlewoman, was earning *his* bread, and that Fanny was a wage-slave too. It was a gentility-fantasy not repressed but bubbling into effervescence.

In a wider and, one fears, in a more hackneyed way, *Little Dorrit* is the story of the effect of fortune upon character. Mr Dorrit, in a very unlikely way and through a remarkable and slenderly rewarded piece of activity on the part of Mr Pancks, suddenly acquires a great estate, and enjoys it in travel and in remunerating Mrs General for 'forming a surface' to enable his daughters to absorb and reflect the high lights of high society—until he pours the whole fortune down the Merdle drain. The moral is that pelf is dross and that the 'surface' is as imprisoning as the Marshalsea itself.

Mr Merdle was Dickens's fullest portrait of a financier. Fledgeby, Ralph Nickleby and their kind seem just to have been usurers. Tigg Montague's flotation of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company can hardly be taken more seriously than Mr Bonney's and Ralph Nickleby's activities on behalf of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. In Merdle's case there were elements of realism. His was an empty life, dyspeptic, reserved, getting nothing for itself out of the irksome splendour of his establishment. Where the realism fails is in the absence of any plausible account of his positive activities. He had a Midas touch, and everybody knew it; and that was that. After his suicide we are simply told that he was 'the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows'.

In short, Dickens as a critic of commercialism and especially of high finance need not be taken too seriously.

Regarding education, on the other hand, Dickens was a knowledgeable as well as an effective critic of much of its practice, though he had little to say about its general theory.

After Job Trotter had outwitted Sam Weller, Mr Tony Weller gave Sam a piece of his mind. 'Why I know a young un as hasn't had half nor quarter your eddication—as hasn't slept about the markets, no, not six months—who'd a scorned to be let in in such a vay; scorned it Sammy.' Of the great troop of boys in Dickens's pages, some seem to have had no education except the education of the streets, but most should be presumed, like Sam, to have had some other schooling too. Again, Dickens described several schoolmasters. There were kindly village schoolmasters like Marton, Little Nell's friend, but we do not hear much about their methods or their scholastic qualifications. We know of Bradley Headstone, a town schoolmaster, that 'from his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage'; and Headstone, despite his incapacity for courtship, was clearly intended to be more efficient at his job than most such schoolmasters.

What roused Dickens to unforgettable effectiveness was the spectacle of schools that were either charities or affected some sort of bedraggled gentility. Of the former order was the Charitable Grinders to which the condescending Mr Dombey sent Polly Toodle's son Rob to be the butt of the street boys on account of his ridiculous uniform, but to have the chance of rising somewhat higher in the social scale than his brothers and sisters and other railwaymen's children. Of the latter order we have Dotheboys Hall and its feebler predecessor, Salem House.

When the experiment with Rob the Grinder had palpably failed, Mr Dombey's curt comment to the boy's father was 'The usual return', and Mr Dombey's friend, Major Bagstock, the third in the company, made the characteristic observation, 'Take advice from plain old Joe, and never educate that sort of people, sir. Damme, sir, it never does. It always fails.' So Mr Toodle the engine-driver had no chance to submit that 'his son, the quondam Grinder, buffed and cuffed, and flogged and badged, and taught,

as parrots are, by a brute jobbed into his place of schoolmaster with as much fitness for it as a hound, might not have been educated in quite a right plan in some undiscovered respect'.

In Dotheboys Hall the sadistic brute of a schoolmaster was not jobbed into his post, but set up on a private venture designed, in the first place, to extract a profit from twenty pounds per miserable head per annum, paid for 'fondlings', love-children, step-children and other unwanted encumbrances of the semi-genteel, and in the second place to get healthy, happy and abundant exercise by the use of the cane. If few schools can have been quite as bad as Dotheboys Hall, many were quite as bad as Salem House. If any teaching was done it was done by the ushers. The boys were lucky if these sweated hirelings had the attainments of Mr Mell or of young Mr Nickleby.

Dickens tells us something about the more expensive schooling of the upper middle classes. Dr Blimber's academy meant well by little Paul Dombey, but it was a forcing house sedulously tended by Mr Feeder, B.A., and the three Ciceronian Blimbers. Mr Pocket was an admirable if unmethodical tutor for Pip. David Copperfield could say nothing too good about Dr Strong at Canterbury, and seems to have prized a classical education. In the case of Richard Carstone, however, who may have been at a public school, Dickens opined that Carstone's teachers, instead of adapting Carstone to Latin verses, should have adapted their instruction to Carstone. There is little about the education in Young Ladies' Seminaries, though quite enough about the attitude of headmistresses like Miss Twinkleton or Miss Monflathers towards the danger of contamination with any thing or person not quite genteel. Some dark suspicions about underfeeding in these establishments were sometimes entertained; and Mrs Billickin, that redoubtable landlady, thus addressed Miss Twinkleton: 'For a rush from scanty feeding to generous feeding, and from what you may call messing to what you may call method, do require a power of constitution which is not often found in youth, particular when undermined by boarding school.'

All this, however, falls definitely short of a philosophy of education, and it may be doubted whether Dickens believed there was any such thing, even if he did make prosy John Willet ask 'What would my boy Joe have been if I hadn't drawed his faculties out of him?' At any rate young Martin Chuzzlewit, on being informed in America that Professor Mullit was a professor of education, remarked, 'A sort of schoolmaster, possibly'.

By way of supplement it may be remarked that young Martin Chuzzlewit did not contradict his American friend Mr Bevan when Bevan said that, in matters of education, 'We shine out brightly in comparison with England certainly; but hers is a very extreme case'.

So much for a rough indication of some of the more important of Dickens's set attacks upon particular abuses. Let us now return to Dickens's general basis for all such attacks and for his plea for the under-dog. I described it earlier as 'compassion and a general philanthropical morality'. The description needs a defence.

Like his own Pecksniff, Dickens was fond of 'letting off moral crackers'. His 'winegary parties' let them off, as Miggs did. 'I hope I know my own unworthiness, and that I hate and despise myself and all my fellow creatures as every practicable Christian should.' His honest amiable characters let them off. 'We eats our biled mutton without capers', said Sam Weller, 'and don't care for horse radish ven ve can get beef.' 'I mean', said Mr Toots, 'that I shall consider it my duty as a fellow-creature generally, until I am claimed by the silent tomb, to make the best of myself and to—to have my boots as highly polished—as circumstances will admit of.' Again, the Dickens characters who are just types in the long tradition of a comedy of 'humours'—Mr Dombey of Pride, Jonas Chuzzlewit of Greed, Uriah Heep of Servility—let off the moral crackers of their type as a matter of course. Jonas, for instance, preferred 'the long and the short of it is' to 'the truth is'.

Such a moralism is rather too individualized, and often too stylistic for general purposes; and Dickens, quite plainly, had as

good as no interest in the technique of professional moralists. Except for his amateurish attacks on Bentham, including the attack in *Hard Times*, the only piece of academic moralism I have noticed in his pages was his manifest surprise at the vogue of the moral sense theory of ethics in Martin Chuzzlewit's America. That surprise was historically appropriate. The moral sense theory, somewhat *démodé* in Dickens's England, had retained a greater vitality in Scotland and, through Scotland, in America.

In general, Dickens held firmly to the stability of goodness. 'There is nothing innocent or good that dies and is forgotten', said Mr Marton the schoolmaster. 'Let us hold to that faith or none.' Similarly, as one would expect of her, Agnes Wickfield was sure that 'simple love and truth will prevail in the end'. Speaking in his own name, Dickens said in his preface to *Oliver Twist*: 'I wished to show in little Oliver the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance'—and survive it did though not without Maylie-Brownlow assistance.

Dickens also alined uprightness with goodness and virtue. Cousin Feenix, 'with a real and genuine earnestness', solemnly adjured Edith to make what reparation she could for the wrong she had done 'because it *is* wrong and not right'. According to Boffin, 'There's always a straight way to everything'. According to Joe Gargery, 'If you can't get to be uncommon through going straight you'll never get to do it through going crooked'.

Nevertheless, if there had to be a choice, Dickens inclined towards lovingkindness and away from righteousness. Of Betty Higden he wrote: 'She was not a logically reasoning woman; but God is good, and hearts may count as high in Heaven as heads.' He obviously agreed with Mrs Boffin when she said: 'It is, as Mr Rokesmith says, a matter of feeling; but Lor! how many matters *are* matters of feeling.' In *Barnaby Rudge* he tells us that those who miss the greater things are 'like some wise men, who, learning to know each planet by its Latin name, have quite forgotten such small heavenly constellations as Charity, Forbearance, Universal Love and Mercy'.

These four were his guiding stars though he may not have held, to quote Mr Squeers in another context, that, following them, 'you'll go right slap to Heaven and no questions asked'. Probably he seldom if ever contemplated a serious conflict between kindness and righteousness; and his relative disparagement of the latter, when it occurs, seems to be a disparagement of the abuses perpetrated in the name of duty. 'O late remembered, much-forgotten, mouthing braggart duty,' he says in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 'always owed and seldom paid in any other coin than punishment and wrath, when will mankind begin to know thee?' The occasion was Pecksniff's dismissal of Tom Pinch under the pretence of righteous indignation. Similarly, he seems to have believed that 'duty', besides being entangled with savage punishment,¹ was also apt to be allied with a disingenuous policy of full employment. So thought Mr Pancks. 'Keep me always at it and I'll keep you always at it, and you keep somebody else always at it. There you have the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country.'

The liberal, largely sentimental philanthropy which formed so considerable a part of Dickens's moral philosophy had certain special features. As we have seen it was *not* the philosophical philanthropy of Bentham and the other utilitarians. Again, it was not the philanthropy of professed philanthropists. *Their* philanthropy, according to Dickens, was a mischievous game sufficiently illustrated by such players as Mrs Jellyby, Mrs Pardiggle and the second Mrs Tony Weller, all of whom neglected their homes and husbands shamefully in order nominally to do some disservice or other to the dusky inhabitants of some remote continent. It would seem, indeed, that Dickens favoured a contracted not a universal philanthropy with no organization behind it.

Perhaps for this reason the philanthropy he favoured was without much benefit of clergy. Mr Crisparkle was a kind man,

¹ Cf. the 'debilitated' cousin in *Bleak House*: 'Haven't a doubt—zample—far better hang wrong f'ler than no f'ler.'

as well as a good and a wise one, but the Dean of Cloisterham showed truer to his cloth when young Nevile Landless was under suspicion of murder. 'We clergy keep our hearts warm and our heads cool, and we hold a judicious middle course.' The dissenting clergy—Stiggins, Chadband, the Rev. Melchisedech Howler—were no better. The Rev. Luke Honeythunder, of the Haven of Philanthropy, London, may have been an Anglican. According to Dickens his motto was 'Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed'.

It must be confessed that the philanthropists Dickens admired most, namely, the Cheeryble twins, were quite insufferable, and that we seldom care whether 'the kind man', 'the single gentleman' and some others had a name or not. They might as well be anonymous spirits. But Brownlow was something of a person, and so, in a mannered way, were Lorry, Grewgious and their kind. Mr Jarndyce, I think, was altogether a person.

Jarndyce's open-handedness towards Harold Skimpole may indicate (what in any case is the truth) that the benevolent are apt to befriend pretty indefensible beneficiaries. It was Perker who made conditions when Mr Pickwick became the angel-in-gaiters to Jingle and Trotter. Dickens, however, never attempted a defence of such beneficiaries. He would have had every decent human being as independent as Betty Higden and was far from approving, without qualification, a philanthropy which had nothing in view beyond some other person's comfort. Dickens had no mind to defend the 'Drone Philosophy'¹ of Harold Skimpole. 'You will excuse me. I cannot attend to the shop. I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see, and so short a time to see it in, that I must take the liberty of looking around me and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him.'

Dickens's philanthropical moralism need not have any other origin than his genial acceptance of what he found most congenial in the Christian tradition. Sometimes, however, he philo-

¹ Dickens's phrase before Wodehouse.

sophized about it, attempting to show that it was supremely 'natural'. Being an honest man, and also intellectually curious, he allowed that the theory contained its perplexities, and might easily become ridiculous.

One of the difficulties was Sam Weller's who, on being rebuked for jesting about one of the best feelings of our nature, as instanced in Mr Winkle's devotion to Arabella Allen, humbly submitted 'that he wouldn't if he was aware of it; but there were so many on 'em that he hardly knowed which was the best ones when he heerd 'em mentioned'.

It must be admitted that the theory of 'natural' affection, particularly of parents for their children and of brothers for sisters, underwent a very severe strain in Dickens's pages. In most of his novels it is a safe bet that if the family histories of any notable characters are not carefully given, these characters are as good as certain to turn out to be blood relations, everyone being amazed except the reader.

In some obscure way, most of them passed this exacting test, for instance, Esther Summerson in the case of Lady Dedlock, or Oliver Fleming-Twist later Brownlow in the case of Rose Fleming-Maylie. Sometimes, however, there were doubts.

When the wicked Snawley claimed Smike for his son the following dialogue occurred:

'It was parental instinct, sir', observed Squeers.

'That's what it was, sir', rejoined Snawley. 'The elevated feeling, the feeling of the ancient Romans and Grecians, and of the beasts of the field and fowls of the air, with the exception of rabbits and tom-cats, which sometimes devour their offspring. My heart yearned towards him. I could have—I don't know what I couldn't have done to him in the anger of a father.'

'It only shows what Natur is, sir', said Mr Squeers. 'She's a rum'un, is Natur.'

'She is a holy thing, sir', remarked Snawley.

'I believe you', added Mr Squeers with a moral sigh. 'I should like to know how we should ever get on without her. Natur', said Mr Squeers solemnly, 'is more easier conceived than described. O! what a blessed thing, sir, to be in a state of Natur.'

On this celebrated occasion Snawley was making a fraudulent claim to paternity, but his audience, with the exception of Squeers, had no reason to doubt the story. Nicholas Nickleby, one of the audience, went straight to brother Charles Cheeryble with the news; and Cheeryble had a spasm of common sense:

My dear sir you fall into the very common mistake of charging upon Nature, matters with which she has not the smallest connexion, and for which she is in no way responsible. Men talk of Nature as an abstract thing and lose sight of what is natural while they do so....If Nature in such a case [as Smike's] got into that lad's breast one secret prompting which urged him towards his father and away from you, she would be a liar and an idiot.

This piece of common sense, however, like much common sense, is somewhat obscure in its reasoning, and Mr Cheeryble himself, within a few pages, as on all the other pages, treats Madeline Bray's devotion to her father as a sublime and very admirable instance of natural affection. Madeline, it is true, knew her father; but she knew him too well. Her submissive acceptance of her daughterly duty, like Florence Dombey's, was pathological.

On at least one occasion, in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens enquired for some pages into the theme which he described as follows:

It might be worth while, sometimes, to inquire into what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural.

The upshot of the discussion seems to be that we cannot acquiesce in the view that civilization 'naturally' breeds a moral pestilence, just as cities 'naturally' form clouds of smoke. God *must* have had the design of making the world a better place.

In the same book Mrs 'Cleopatra' Skewton also philosophized about 'Nature'.

'Why are we not more natural? Dear me! With all these yearnings and gushings, and impulsive throbbings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?'

Mr Dombey thought it was very true, very true.

When I began this piece of research I expected that a substantial part of it would deal with the dexterity of Dickens as an un-academic logician. Now, at its close, I have less to say about that than I had hoped—but I have something.

There are points of technical interest. On the ambiguity of terms we have Mrs Wilfer at her best. 'I was about to say that when I use the term attractions I do not mean it in any way whatever', with which may be compared the Cheerybles' servant's 'leastways in a contrairy sense which the meaning is the same'. On methods of denying the consequent we have the dialogue in *Great Expectations*:

'How do you spell Gargery, Joe?'

'I don't spell it at all.'

'But supposing you did?'

'It can't be supposed;'

and Mr Dick's reply to the question whether he ever saw a crocodile overcome: 'I don't think I ever saw a crocodile.' On tautological definitions we have, among dozens, the red-haired Mr Magnus: 'Company you see—company is—is—it's a very different thing from solitude, ain't it?' We have a good deal, too, about the logic of verification. 'The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it', said Captain Bunsby that master-minded mariner. More elaborately we have Sam Weller's account of a very resolute attempt to prove 'the great principle that crumpets wos wholesome':

'How many crumpets, at a sittin', do you think 'ud kill me off at once?' said the patient. 'I don't know', says the doctor. 'Do you think half-a-crown's worth 'ud do it?' says the patient. 'I think it might', says the doctor. 'Three shillin's' worth 'ud be sure to do it I s'pose?' says the patient. 'Certainly', says the doctor. 'Wery good,' says the patient, 'good night.' Next mornin' he gets up, has a fire lit, orders in three shillin's worth o' crumpets, toasts 'em all, eats 'em all, and blows his brains out.

Sometimes we have arguments which, to quote Mr Leo Hunter, were 'all point sir'; for instance, this discussion between the Fat Boy and Mary:

'What a nice young lady Miss Emily is.'

'I knows a nicerer.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes, indeed.'

'What's her name?'

'What's yours?'

'Mary.'

'So's hers. You're her.'

And, of course, we have dozens of argumentative people. 'For the matter of that, Phil,' said old John Willet, 'argueyment is a gift of Nature.' It could also be cultivated by persons like Mrs Micawber whose parents and husband agreed in regarding as 'a woman of a remarkable lucidity of intellect'. For the most part the arguers argue, with the same trick of argument, from the moment they open their mouths in the story to the last page on which they are allowed to perform. Sometimes, however, they change or forget some of their logical tricks. Susan Nipper, for example, was very resourceful in analogical argument for a few pages when she was about fourteen. At that stage of her development remarks like, 'I may be very fond of periwinkles, Mrs Richards, but it doesn't follow that I want 'em for tea', cascaded from her lips. Later she abandoned the trick though not her argumentativeness.

One of the many examples of Mrs Micawber's lucidity may suffice for illustration of this matter:

'This at least is the light, my dear Mrs Copperfield, in which *I* view the subject. When I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was accustomed to ask, when any point was under discussion in our limited circle "In what light does my Emma view the subject?" That my papa was too partial, I know: still on such a point as the frigid coldness which has ever subsisted between Mr Micawber and my family, I necessarily have formed an opinion, delusive though it may be....'

'Now I may be ~~w~~rong in my conclusions; it is very likely that I am; but my individual impression is that the gulf between my father and Mr Micawber may be traced to an apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr Micawber would require pecuniary accommodation.

I cannot help thinking that there are members of my family who have been apprehensive that Mr Micawber would solicit them for their names—I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children, but to be inscribed on Bills of Exchange and negotiated in the Money Market.'

The common complaint that Dickens's characters, despite all the blood in so many of them, were exaggerations and, indeed, caricatures, has substance in it. They had to run true to type, and the type is rare in nature. Part of the complaint, however, is due to the circumstance that, in speech even more than in action, the logic implicit in their type is obtruded rather too often. The trouble is not, as Mark Tapley said to Tom Pinch, that their 'conversation's always equal to print'. If it were not, why print it? It is that they talk rather too frequently and rather too consistently in accordance with the formal logic of their types, and of their trades.

Mr Toodle, the engine driver, *might* have said: 'What a Junction a man's thoughts is to be sure.' Mr Lillyvick, the collector of water rates, *might* have said: 'The plug of life is dry, sir, and but the mud is left.' One doubts the fact in both cases. A rough customer like Riderhood was very likely to talk about the sweat of his brow. Was he likely to say: 'I'm going to earn from five to ten thousand pounds by the sweat of my brow, and is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without it being took down?' Cruncher the body-snatcher might well describe himself euphemistically as 'an honest tradesman'. Is it likely he would enlarge on the theme in the way he did? 'If I as an honest tradesman succeed in providing a jinte of meat or two, none of your not touching of it and sticking to bread. If I, as an honest tradesman, am able to provide a little beer, none of your declaring on water. When you go to Rome do as Rome does. Rome will be a ugly customer to you if you don't. I'm your Rome, you know.' Doubtless Mr Mould's, the undertaker's, daughters 'played at berryins down in the shop', as Mrs Gamp said they did. Bless their imitative little psychic centres, why

shouldn't they? But is it likely that Mr Mould, after a dose of Mrs Gamp's flattery, would say, 'She's the sort of woman, now, one would almost feel disposed to bury for nothing; and do it neatly too'? As for Mrs Gamp herself, it is not very easy to be convinced by her elaborations, made without a leer and when she was not screwed very tight, of the theme that death is 'as certain as being born except that we can't make our calculations as exact'.

And what of the letter to Sam on Mrs Weller's death which Mr Tony Weller got someone to write and signed in his usual block letters?

Her veels wos immedetly greased and everythink done to set her agoin as could be inwented your father had hopes as she would have vorked round as usual but just as she was a turnen the corner my boy she took the wrong road and vent down hill vith a welocity you never see and notwithstanding that the drag wos put on directly by the medikel man it wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evening havin done the journey wery much under the reglar time vich praps wos partly owen to her haven taken in wery little luggage by the vay.

Chapter IX

SOME FACETS IN BROWNING'S POETRY

THAT GOD THE CREATOR has all the power there is; that He is also all-loving; that man, though always God's creature, is not God's mere beneficiary; that sense and the impermanent, sweet and gracious as they often are, are not enough for a soul; that evil, having its purpose, is swallowed up in perfection; that faith is tried and strengthened by intellectual doubt; that art, though still creature-work, can re-create what is very nearly a sublunary heaven—these and similar ideas, though perhaps neither very luminous nor very numinous in their bald statement, have greatness in them when they haunt and dominate such a master as Browning was. (I shall try to indicate some of the ways in which he dealt with them.)

In the agony of the present age, there is a fashion, in some quarters, to speak as if Englishmen of Browning's generation, especially those who were in easy circumstances, squandered their capacity for tragic earnestness upon mock convulsions in the empyrean. Their sheltered lives were scarcely ruffled. There were no tempests unless Napoleon III—Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society—was to be accounted a great storm-centre. Some of them, it is true, were social reformers and some were empire-builders. They had plenty to do. The rest, we are told, especially the artists and the intellectuals, set out to transfix metaphysical and theological dragons for want of other opposition even if it were only a windmill's. The days of the rack were over. The advent of the rubber truncheon was unsuspected. So they invented a metaphysico-theological torture-chamber.

The point did not escape Browning's attention. The Pope in *The Ring and the Book* was aware of it:

No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp:
We have built wall and sleep in city safe:

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But if some earthquake try the towers that laugh
To think they once saw lions rule outside,
And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
Prepared to die—which means alive at last?

In essence, however, it is a mistaken point. Speculations about religion, faith, fate, time and eternity are not mere luxuries for quiet times, and it is only the poorer sort of man who remains unmoved because the storm-centre is in things invisible. Browning may have lived easily in easy times; but surely he was right in declining to believe that his soul's struggle to comprehend and surpass itself, to comprehend and 'decrassify' its environment was a luxury-product rather like Bishop Blougram's pinch of snuff 'threatening the torpor of the inside nose'. Browning would 'burn his soul out in showing you the truth'.

It was axiomatic for Browning that power came first, the power of the Creator Almighty. This was so plain to him that he seldom deigned to examine it, and, very often indeed, was content to speak the language of oriental dependence—the metaphor of the Potter in *Rabbi ben Ezra*, or, in *Ferishtah's Fancies*:

Never enough faith in omnipotence,
Never too much, by parity, of faith
In impuissance, man's, which turns to strength
When once acknowledged weakness every way

and in *Pippa Passes*:

All service ranks the same with God
If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth and only as God wills
Can work—God's puppets best and worst
And we; there is no last or first.

It is true that *Ferishtah* and the *Rabbi* were orientals and that *Pippa* was not a theologian. Nevertheless, God's absolute power was a fixed star in Browning's firmament. Indeed it may be doubted whether Browning ever gave enough attention to the general problem of the reconciliation of God's absolute power

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with the relative independence of man. (We shall see more about that as we proceed. For the time being it may be sufficient to notice some of the ways in which) Browning attempted an accommodation if not a reconciliation.

Bishop Blougram, very likely with his tongue in his cheek, was at least apparently straightforward:

By life and man's free will, God gave for that.
To mould life as we choose it shows our choice;
That's our one act, the previous work's His own.

In *A Death in the Desert* we have:

Man is not God but hath God's end to serve.
A master to obey, a course to take,
Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become. . . .
How could man have progression otherwise?

In *Rabbi ben Ezra*:

Rejoice! we are allied
To That which doth provide,
And not partake, effects and not receive.
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

In *Christmas Eve*:

You know what I mean, God's all, man's naught;
But also God whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, a hairbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly made to live.

Beyond any peradventure, however, Browning believed very firmly that mere power should not elicit any man's devotion. As the Pope said in *The Ring and the Book*, divinity was shown in the Incarnation and Atonement:

Beside which even the creation fades
Into a puny exercise of power.

Browning's negative argument in this matter appears very clearly in his *Caliban upon Setebos: or Natural Theology in the Island*. Caliban, it will be remembered, was the monstrous, irreclaimable bastard who had Sycorax for his dam; and Sycorax was a witch, that is, owned Setebos or the Devil for lord and master, that is, worshipped the Devil as the Demiurge or world-creator. She allowed, indeed, that there was One above Setebos, namely 'The Quiet'; but Caliban, although he allowed that 'the stars came otherwise' than through the god-devil-demiurge Setebos, did not effectively get beyond a theology of capricious, unchallengeable world-power, the tyranny of a super-Caliban partly modelled upon the monster's ideas about Prospero (which, we may think, were not wholly groundless, since Prospero undoubtedly exploited Ariel, whether or not it was true that no nurture could stick upon the 'born devil' Caliban).

Upon such foundations the monster built his Calibanesque or 'natural' theology. Did Setebos create earth and moon because He was ill at ease like a rock-fish sliding into warmth? Did He create out of spite? Scarcely, thought Caliban. More likely He would

Make what Himself would fain in a manner be
Weaker in most points, stronger in a few
Worthy and yet mere playthings all the while
Though He admires and mocks too—that is it.

Is He mere strength, and neither cruel nor kind? Might not Caliban playfully and curiously mutilate crabs and jays and sea-urchins without active malevolence?

His dam held that the Quiet made all things
Which Setebos vexed only: holds not so
Who made them weak meant weakness he might vex.

What is Setebos but Terror?

If He have done His best, make no new world
To please Him more, so leave off watching this—
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
Some strange day—or, suppose, grow into

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As grubs grow butterflies; else, here are we,
And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

So, according to Browning, unless we are devil-worshippers we must believe positively that this power is also love:

Beneath the veriest ash there hides a spark of soul
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
O' the grey and fire again be free.¹

Such a power

Would never (my soul understood)
With power to work all love desires
Bestow e'en less than love requires.²

Hence we may infer a certain oneness between God and man.

God

Never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires and bade
Remember whence it sprang, nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.³

Or

For life with all it yields of joy or woe
And hope and fear—believe the aged friend—
Is just one chance o' the prize of learning love
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.⁴

Or

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! My flesh that I seek
In the Godhead. I seek and I find it. O Saul it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee, a man like to me
That shall live and be loved for ever.⁵

Browning, indeed, was prepared to express the doctrine out of the mouth of Ferishtah, the Persian. 'Be love your light and trust your guide, with these explore my heart' said Ferishtah. Why do we Persians worship the sun, a 'ball compressed of spirit fire'? As a symbol of the Prime Giver. And must not any giver be man-like?

What have I in mind, thus worshipping, unless a man, my like,
Howe'er above me?

¹ From *Fifine at the Fair*.

² From *Christmas Eve*.

³ *Any Wife to any Husband*.

⁴ *A Death in the Desert*.

⁵ *Saul*.

Consequently, said Ferishtah:

I needs must blend the quality of man
With quality of God and so assist
Mere human sight to understand my life.

But, it was the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation that made such suggestions solid.

Mr Sludge, the medium, had his own way of accepting the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation:

Was it likelier now
That this our one out of all worlds beside
The what-d'you-call-them millions should be just
Precisely chosen to make Adam for
And all the rest o' the tale? Yet the tale's true, you know.

Very appropriately, the Pope, in *The Ring and the Book*, dealt with the same question much more fully when he tried to answer the ultimate question:

Why live
Except for love—how love unless they know?

Incomprehensibly, he, the Pope, had been chosen to be God's vicar on earth:

Just as, if new philosophy know aught,
This our earth out of all the multitude
Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed—
Was chosen and no sun-star of the swarm
For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act.

This was revealed truth:

There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
In the world's mouth which I find credible.
I love it with my heart: unsatisfied
I try it with my reason, nor discept
From any point I probe and pronounce sound.

Philosophically speaking (the Pope went on) mind is above matter, and neither matter nor from matter; but man's mind, high and strong as it is, is deficient in goodness:

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What lacks then of perfection fit for God
But just the instance which this tale supplies
Of love without a limit? So is strength,
So is intelligence, let love be so,
Unlimited in its self-sacrifice;
Then is the tale true and shows God complete.
Beyond the tale I reach into the dark,
Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands.

So assured, it was quite possible to accept 'the dread machinery of sin and sorrow'. Some, it is true, asked: 'Well, is the thing we see salvation?' but

I

Put no such dreadful question to myself
Within whose circle of experience burns
The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness—God.
I must outlive a thing ere know it dead.

How can man love but what he yearns to help?
And that which men think weakness within strength
But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
What were it else but the first things made new,
But repetition of the miracle?
The divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends and aye begins for man?
So never I miss footing in the maze?
No—I have light nor fear the dark at all.

In *Easter Day* Browning developed this philosophy more dialectically, that is, he began with a theme or a commonplace rather loosely stated and attempted to reach the heart of it by successive conquests over imprecision and oversight.

The general theme of the poem was very simple, neither more nor less than

How very hard it is to be
A Christian.

The earlier dialectic of the poem came to a standstill with the question whether blind faith need be much better than a child's:

Just

A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
Aside, a wicked mage to stop
And, lo ye, I have kissed Queen Mab!

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A vision had then to be interposed, the Vision of Judgment:

The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top, a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

Distraught, but still argumentative, the poet was disposed to plead that Christian otherworldliness and this-worldly renunciation were unnecessary, this world being so exquisite. He was told that he had been judged, had mistaken 'the arras folds that variegate God's chamber' for the chamber itself, was still unaware that

All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude.

Next the poet pleaded that there was Art. That, said the Voice, might be very good; but so was the world as its Creator said when he rested on the seventh day. The goodness of fit, although so great, was only preparatory. Even Angelo's art was:

Titanically infantine
Laid at the breast of the divine.

Then the poet clutched desperately at knowledge:

Mind is best
I will seize Mind, forgo the rest.

That too was vanity. 'The goal's a ruin like the rest' said the inexorable Voice.

And so at last the poet came upon the only possible solution:

Behold my spirit bleeds,
Catches no more at broken reeds.
But lilies flower these reeds above.
I let the world go and take love.

At last he had apprehended.

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Otherworldliness, however, whether of beauty, or love, or duty was not the whole of Browning's creed, indispensable though it was. There was earthly beauty:

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere,
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air.¹

There was also human love, and especially the love of man for woman. No one was more sensitive than Browning both to the transience and to what he often thought the mystical fadelessness of such love. In his *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, for instance, we have both Catullus and Ecclesiastes:

'Were you happy?' 'Yes.' 'And are you still as happy?' 'Yes.'
'And you?'
—'Then more kisses.'—'Did I stop them when a million seemed
so few?'

Hark the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to.

but also:

What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

Very often the fadelessness triumphed, as in *Cristina*:

Doubt you if in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly
Ages past the soul existed;
Here an age 'tis resting merely
And hence fleets again for ages
While the true end sole and single
It stops here for is, this love-way
With some other soul to mingle.

and in *Any Wife to Any Husband*:

How the world is made for each of us,
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus
When a soul declares itself—to wit
By its fruit, the thing it does.

¹ *Two in the Campagna.*

With an ampler sweep Rabbi ben Ezra himself appeared to hesitate when he tried to unite time with eternity:

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey.
A whisper from the west
Shoots. Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth; here dies another day.

But *Fifine at the Fair* was Browning's most sustained attempt at a philosophy of human love.

The prologue he called 'amphibian' (it was nearly, but not quite tribian). Men were not merely land animals, though, often, they found the land very good. Swimming or floating, with some risk and some illusions, they discovered that water was, on the whole, a more instructive element, but they could not compete with the shining grace of flying things:

Because the membraned wings
So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
Like soul and nought beside.

The poet and his wife Elvire 'trip and skip' to the fair at Pornic, the poet at least being in a frolicsome mood though he was going to philosophize very copiously. The 'wild' life of the booths stirred him. Had the tame, the respectable nothing to learn from it, even if the members of the troupe were no better than they should be? Were the wild quite wrong in regarding the smug with aloofness, as persons from whom to extract sous or perhaps a franc, and so buy their bread? *Fifine* pranks it in her spangled charms: 'Points toe, imposes haunch and pleads with tambourine'. She has the negligent condescension of the wild. What she wants is supper with the strong man of the troupe, her legal or illegal lord and master.

Surely *Fifine*, the mere sight of her, is worth a franc. Romance deserves some tribute. If it were not so, Helen and Cleopatra would never have been heard of. There is *Fifine*. Therefore there

is witchery. 'Through the outward sign, the inward grace allures.' Is there not an inward grace in *everything*?

Partake my confidence. No creature's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate
Its supreme worth, fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.

Does it follow that Fifine, the fizgig, and Elvire the poet's wife, goddess and ideal, his Eidothée, are nothing different from one another? Let Elvire give the poet her attention:

Few families were racked
By torture self-applied, did Nature grant but this—
That women comprehend mental analysis.

So perpend, Elvire. Do you recall our purchase of the Raphael—how the prince, its owner, stood out for a higher price, how the Americans raised their bids? In the end we had the precious thing for our very own. Do I undervalue it simply because I do not kneel before it, day in, day out, for the rest of my life? May I never have eyes for Doré? If the house were to take fire you would know where my treasure was. I would die to save the Raphael.

Ask Plato, Elvire. For him as for me sense was the lattice of the soul. It pointed towards an ideal, a goddess, an Eidothée. I have learned

Love's law which I avow
And thus would formulate: each soul, lives, longs and works
For itself, by itself—because a lodestar lurks,
An other than itself—in whatsoe'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclitch
May grasp the Gulliver.

'I too achieved Eidothée, In silence and by night.' There is no point, Elvire, in objecting, as you do, that I have now only an ageing Elviré, a

tall thin personage with paled eye, pensive face,
Any amount of love and some remains of grace.

For Eidothée is timeless.

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Let me return (the poet says) to the amphibian similitude. I am a swimmer in the wash of the world, pushing and paddling through the foam, but making shift, at whiles, to pluck deep into the roots of truth. The froth and the spume are error, part blinding, part stimulating. Of such stuff is Fifine's sparkle; but it is not all make-believe:

♪ If I dream, at least I know I dream.
 The falsity, beside, is fleeting: I can stand
 Still and let truth come back—your steadying touch of hand
 Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid
 All on the move.

You tell me 'There can be but one Best'. I grant it you, but mind is venturesome, and has a fancy for voyaging in the frailest craft. We have not just one voyage and then a safe haven for ever:

 Our life is lent
 From first to last, the whole, for this experiment,
 Of proving what I say—that we ourselves are true.

Music might convey such truths better than mere words. And Fifine's is a tawdry stage. So remember Schumann's *Carnival* and then look for a greater stage. Think of a great fair at Venice, not of a little show at Pornic. Think of the world as a fair, its revellers masked all their lives long. The figures are grotesque and exaggerated, but are less grotesque and less exaggerated when one comes to perceive a certain potency of soul in each of them, when one notes that the whole carnival mistily signifies something that abides. Soul has its claims, although it does not *register* its triumphs as easily, as obviously, as sense does—

 the want, the evidence
 That the thing wanted, soon or late, will be supplied.

Since Browning's optimism expressed many moods, and, moreover, moods dramatically appropriate to the speakers, not

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necessarily their author's mind, it would be folly to treat all such statements as parts of a considered philosophy and examine their consistency. On the other hand, some indications of their variety should be attempted.

Sometimes the optimism is very modest, as in *Cristina*:

Oh! We're sunk enough here God knows
But not quite so sunk that moments
Sure though seldom are denied us
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones.

Sometimes it is the optimism, the theophany of Nature, as in *Sordello*:

Up and down
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
To throb the secret forth, a touch divine—
And the sealed eyeball owns the mystic rod,
Visibly through his garden walketh God.

It may be the spring in Pippa's heart: ✓

The hill-side's dew-pearled:
The lark's on the wing:
The snail's on the thorn:
} God's in his heaven—
} All's right with the world. ✓

Sometimes it is very tranquil as in *Johannes Agricola*:

(I lie where I have always lain;
God smiles as he has always smiled.)

Sometimes it is very general as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*: ✓

The world's no blot for us,
N It means intensely and means good.

Very often it is an optimism in struggle not an optimism of victory, as in the last of Browning's poems, the epilogue to *Asolando*,

Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better.

Frequently, however, it is an optimism of eternal perfection.

Abt Vogler is often quoted as an expression of what is sometimes called an 'emergent' philosophy, that is, of the creation of novelty, making out of three sounds 'not a fourth sound but a star'. So it was; but only in a subordinate sense. All perfection came from above. 'The emulous heavens yearned down.' It was 'the finger of God, a flash of the will that can' stimulating the musician's soul to the apparent mundane 'creation' of what was eternally in heaven:

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound:
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good
more:
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.

Browning's only qualification of this principle, I think—and the limitation was only specious—was that these truths had to be adapted to man's capacity. Thus the Pope in *The Ring and the Book*:

Our known unknown, our God revealed to men
Existent somewhere, somehow as a whole,
Here as a whole proportioned to our sense,
There (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus!)
In the absolute immensity, the whole
Appreciable solely by Thyself,
Here by the little mind of man reduced
To littleness that suits his faculty.

In the face of so vast and so varied an optimism the 'problem' of evil may be thought (by some) to shrink to very modest proportions. Either it is 'nought' as it was for Abt Vogler, or it 'means good intensely' as for Fra Lippo Lippi. There would remain, of course, the question as to *how* it meant good. The answer, in the main, was supplied (Browning thought) by his moralism. But he had also some other suggestions. In *Cleon* he hinted forlornly:

That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part to grace the after time.

And Bishop Blougram was pert enough:

Some think Creation's meant to show Him forth;
I say it's meant to hide Him all it can,
And that's what all the blessed evil's for.

In *Ferishtah's Fancies*, Browning treated the question elaborately. Ferishtah was asked why omnipotence, having the power, did not purge the world of sin and woe. He replied that, were pain abolished, the 'bond twixt man and man' would be cut. Then he was told that 'the sheltered rose' excels 'the wilding brier'. He rebuked the objector for believing that God was so little above us that we could not praise and love him except for 'attributes commonly deemed lovable'. When asked what he made of an ulcer in the stomach he replied that the ulcer need not be senseless cruelty even if it seemed so. 'Put pain from out the world what room were left, For thank to God, for love to men?' To the objection that, while man's punitive use of pain might be justified, the method was clumsy and repulsive in God, Ferishtah replied that man's punishments were clumsy because designed for the mass. God's care was for each individual soul. From such pain came self-knowledge without which every man was already in hell.

To the question whether good preponderated over evil, a much less searching question than the problem why the Almighty should permit *any* evil at all, Ferishtah, 'I fear, gave rather a cloudy answer. First he said it was a question of preponderance, of more white beans than black beans in the bag, not of all the beans being white. Next he said that he could only speak for himself. Other men's experience, for him, was only a matter of conjecture. For some other men 'blacks may blur their whole'. For himself, all was white.

God is all-good, all-wise, all-powerful: truth?
Take it and rest there.

While Browning's moralism was a moralism of love—'I mind how love repaired all ill, Cured wrong, soothed grief' as he said

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in *Easter Day*—it was also and predominantly a moralism of struggle in which the race was worth far more than the palm.

This thought was ubiquitous with him.

We garland us, we mount from earth to feast in heaven
Just because exist what once we estimated
Hindrances which, better taught, as helps we now compute.¹

Men have to face the challenge 'of a world where their work is all to do',² of 'the petty done, the undone vast, This present of theirs with the hopeful past'.³ As the Pope said in *The Ring and the Book*:

Life is probation and the earth no goal
But starting point of man; compel him strive—
Which means in man as good as reach the goal—
Why institute that race, his life, at all?

Indeed, Browning rated the struggle so very highly, at any rate in man's case, that he frequently seemed to disparage the peace of victory. According to Ferishtah:

Were the man unmanned
Made angel of, angelic every way,
The love and praise that rightly seek and find
Their man-like object now, instructed more
Would go forth idly, air to emptiness.

Similarly, in *Easter Day*, Browning professed himself

Happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man
Not left in God's contempt apart
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.

It was in *Le Byron de nos Jours* that Browning asked whether there were

No feat which, done, would make time break
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity our due?

¹ *Pietro of Abano.*

² *Old Pictures in Florence.*

³ *The Last Ride Together.*

Rabbi ben Ezra is (in part) Browning's most famous expression of this strenuous moralism. In it he 'prizes the doubt, Low kinds exist without'. He 'welcomes each rebuff, That turns earth's smoothness rough'. He passes sentence 'Not on the vulgar mass called "work"' but on 'Fancies that broke through language and, escaped, All I could never be, All men ignored in me'. ↗

The poem, however, contains very great difficulties. Its main theme is that peaceful age sees the whole, though strenuous (or pleasure-loving?) youth sees the part only, that the whole is good and God the Potter to be praised despite 'what flaws may lurk, What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim'. Plainly, the consequent perplexities are immense. What if we or our friends are among the 'flaws'? Why should an old man, on the evidence of his own little life, be able to generalize about the whole wide world? What about those who died young? What precisely is the logic of the lines?

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making than repose on aught found made:
So better age exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst Age. Wait death nor be afraid.

Is age exempt from strife? Is it never uncouth? Need there be no further strenuous probation beyond the grave? If, as the Pope thought in the passage already quoted, striving is man's good, would not age, so far as exempt from strife, be also exempt from good? In *Rabbi ben Ezra*, one of the suggested solutions is:

{ Youth ended, I shall try ↗
My gain or loss thereby: ↗ *again? loss?*
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold. ✓

Certainly the aged Rabbi consistently maintained that the greater goods are not merely given or ready made, but have to be ~~worked~~ worked for, not without dust and heat; but he also held that, earned, they remained exempt from further strife, and, in *that*

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'form, were the greatest of all goods, pure gold freed from all the ashes of the trial.

All the same, this probationary, evolutionary moralism was admirably adapted to Browning's evolutionary 'progressive' age, an age whose Darwinism before the publication of the *Origin of Species* was, in a manner, poetically prefigured in the lovely lines from *Sordello*:

Mere decay
Produces richer life; and day by day
New pollen on the lily-petal grows
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.

Browning's passion for truth, especially the truth about man and God, was as ardent as his passion for love and moral struggle. True he shared his Mr Sludge's contempt for:

The philosophic diner out, the fribble
Who wants a doctrine for a chopping block
To try the edge of his faculty upon,
Prove how much common sense he'll hack and hew
to the critical moment 'twixt the soup and fish

and he probably agreed with his Bishop Blougram that

Even your prime men who appraise their kind
Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves.

He had little sympathy with contemporary sceptics, sceptics about Homer, Jesus the Christ or whatever it might be.

No foul, no fair, no inside, no outside,
There's your world

said Mr Sludge. Blougram's alternative

A life of doubt diversified by faith
For one of faith diversified by doubt

may have seemed to Browning, in a sense, undeniable. But he had all his Pope Innocent's scorn for a certain type of modern view:

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There's a new tribunal now
Higher than God's, the educated man's. . . .

The spirit of culture speaks:
Civilisation is imperative:

and again for too high criticism:

The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat;
We want another legend of the twelve
Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all.

For Browning, as his Ferishtah said, much so-called knowledge might be 'lacquered ignorance', true gold being too simple for the learned, but even if we could ask ourselves significantly whether all we saw might not be love's illusion after all, we were bound to seek rational grounds for the conviction that life could not be 'for mere fool's play, make believe and mumming'. In support, Browning called many independent dramatic witnesses. He called Mr Sludge:

There's something in real truth (explain who can!)
One casts a wistful eye at.

He called Caliban:

God's gift was that men should conceive of truth
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake
As needing help till he reach fact indeed.

man being like a statuary who

All the while goes changing what was wrought
From falsehood like the truth to truth itself.

He called Pope Innocent:

Man's mind, what is it but a convex glass
Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
Picked out of the immensity of sky
To re-unite there, be our heaven for earth?

even if the truth so gathered were:

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Absolute, abstract, independent truth
Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind
Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye—
The same and not the same—else unconceived—
Though quite conceivable to the next grade
Of intelligence.

In the search for such truth Browning was prepared, like his own Dominus Hyacinthus, to 'subdue the bard, And rationalize a little'—indeed to rationalize a great deal.

The earlier part of *Easter Day*, that is, the part before the Vision of Judgment, is an instance. The difficulty of being a Christian, it is argued, is rather the shifting perspective than the height of the Christian ideal. Is not such a difficulty due to lack of belief? Had we the belief it would be easy to be a martyr, to renounce the world, to

Make acquist
Through the fierce minute's brief annoy
Of God's eternity of joy. . . .

Could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what's out.

Is faith, then, the touchstone? God bethink you. Surely knowledge is wanted, a 'God who geometrizes' as Plato said He did. That means (does it not?) that you want God to write the whole story down for you, even if he writes it in a difficult script. You are back where you were. A scientifically demonstrable faith is just an absurdity—well at the very least I would have a probability. Show me that, if only in the rough, and I'll renounce the world and be a martyr. Surely it is easy enough to be a man of one idea, a man who would give his soul to be chief among snuff-box fanciers, or among blindfold chess-players.—Well (says the apologist), there is ample presumptive evidence in favour of Christianity. Love may be discerned in every gift of

life. Does that entitle me (the objector replies) to accept the Incarnation and the Atonement? The objector wanted more than blind faith, the faith of the one-ideal snuff-box collector, faith as a sort of condiment.

So ends the earlier dialectic of the poem.

In this matter, however, Browning gave most of his pains and skill to the special problems most incident to a poet who 'meant intensely', namely the problem of the relations between fact and fancy and the connected problem of the function (more particularly the truth-function) of art.

Regarded as Browning regarded it, the mystery of the relations between fact and fancy is as good as insoluble. He took the contrast to be an absolute antithesis between mind-free fact and fact-free mind. It is small wonder that he had to make an uneasy accommodation between them. Even logistical positivists, these keenly analytical philosophers of the present age, do not fare much better in their attempt to distinguish between imaginative constructions and naked 'protocol' propositions supposed to be mere transcripts of sense-observation; and Browning did not stretch his considerable analytical powers in that direction. Still, there is at least a relative distinction between matter of fact and imaginative fiction. Anyone can discriminate between Caesar's methods in *De Bello Gallico* and Shakespeare's methods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In any case, Browning battled persistently with the problem. In particular, 'Facts and Fancies' was the subtitle of *Asolando*; and *The Ring and the Book* owed its title to the problem.

The title was allegorical. The ring, a thing of art and of beauty, is the gold of fact, what fact had in it to become. 'Just a spirt of the proper fiery acid o'er its face' and you have 'prime nature with its added artistry'. You have 'repristination', that is, recovery of the inward potency of the gold:

The rondure brave, the liliated loveliness
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore.

Similarly, 'this square old yellow book' bought for a lira in a

Florentine square was 'pure crude fact', an objective record of the pleadings at a trial near two centuries ended. It was 'fanciless fact'. What could Browning do with it? 'Well British public, ye who like me not', you think you know the answer. You think my part is just poetical make-believe. Why, yes and no. The book, Browning knew, was gold, a heavy gold ingot:

Yes, but from something else surpassing that
 Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
 Made it bear hammer and be firm to file.
 Fancy with fact is just one fact the more,
 To wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
 Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free
 As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
 And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
 I fused my live soul and that inert stuff
 Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
 After the day when—truth thus grasped and gained—
 The book was shut and done with and laid by.

'The very ABC of fact' (Browning said) is God's creation. Man is not God but he may 'repeat God's process in his due degree'. He grows though he does not create and is 'forced to try and make, else fail to grow'. Though he cannot create he may resuscitate.

Man, bounded, yearning to be free
 May so project his surplusage of soul
 In search of body, so add self to self
 By owning what lay ownerless before—
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate form—
 That although nothing which had never life
 Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
 Yet something dead may get to live again.

The poet, the re-creator, is not quite as other men are. He has

A special gift, an art of arts,
 More insight and more oversight and much more
 Will to use both of these

than his fellow-men. So also the painter, according to *Fra Lippo Lippi*:

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For, don't you mark? We're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see:
And so they are better painted—better to us
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that:
God uses us to help each other so
Lending our minds out.

In *The Ring and the Book* the poet's enterprise was an enterprise of 'resuscitation' because he took his cue from dead fact, from shrivelled history. With Fra Lippo Lippi the stimulus came from present observation. But the general theory was always the same. The artist was an imitator, not of Nature but of God, an imitator of eternal forms which were also quickening and came from the prime fountain of eternal love and beauty. Again, art was humanly universal. The artist 'lent his mind out' to the whole human race and achieved truth in an artist's manner, a truth which, even in fleeting musical chords, was 'confirmed' by eternity which 'yearned' towards it, as Abt Vogler taught. So we read near the end of *The Ring and the Book*:

But Art—wherein man nowise speaks to men—
But only to mankind—Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall—
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived—
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

Browning would gladly have practised all the arts, and music most of all; but he had only one life, and poetry was his choice, or his destiny, or both. This is what he wrote, to his wife, as he took stock of *Men and Women*:

I shall never in the years remaining
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me:

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So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, love.

But he had a consuming zeal, if not for all, for very many of the major arts, a zeal which combined 'insight' with 'outsight' and the 'will to use both of them' with almost inordinate profusion.

'Insight' and 'outsight' are perhaps not very happily contrasted. All vision may literally be oversight even when it is the self-conscious spectator of one's own doings. If, again, 'insight' means understanding, there is no reason why the understanding should not be understanding of the outside world. In a general sense, however, which may be sufficiently intelligible for most unpedantic purposes Browning's mind abounded in the most catholic insights and outsights, especially in the arts. He loved the material of artistry—'peach blossom marble' in *The Bishop orders his Tomb, lapis lazuli*:

Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast.

And jasper:

One block, pure green, as a pistachio nut;
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world.

He loved the technical terms and the technical problems of the arts from 'settling *Hoti's* business' and 'properly basing *Oun'* in the case of his perfervid grammarian to his troubadour's 'rondel, tenzon, virlar or sirvent'. When music was his theme he mingled the import of its technique with the import of his verse as in *A Toccata of Galuppi's*:

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on
sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions—'Must
we die?'
Those commiserating sevenths—'Life might last. We can but try.'

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He loved to collect strange terms, stray bric-à-brac of art, science and history. In his *In a Gondola* he contrived to turn what might have been a catalogue into a sustained and beautiful part of an exquisite poem as he made the lover minutely describe the lady's chamber:

With all its rarities that ache
In silence while day lasts, but wake
At night time and their life renew
Suspended just to pleasure you.

In his own art he experimented with a self-conscious gusto rare in any man, using freak rhymes and strange metres and other Jocoseria, in short, attempting all the tricks of the trade and some outside it.

Especially in his earlier years Browning, very often, 'lent his mind' to his art in the way his Sordello supposed to be the way of poets:

One character
Denotes them through the progress and the stir—
A need to blend with each external charm,
Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm—
In something not themselves; they would belong
To what they worship—stronger and more strong
Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape
And feature, soon imprisons past escape
The votary framed to love and to submit
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
Whence grew the idol's empery.

Later, he said, there was a change, and he tried to describe the change very accurately in the prologue to *Asolando*:

The Poet's age is sad: for why?
In youth the natural world could show
No common object but his eye
At once involved with alien glow—
His own soul's iris-bow.

And now a flower is just a flower:
Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—
Simply themselves, uncinct by dower
Of dyes which, when life's day began,
Round each in glory ran.

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Such thoughts were largely Wordsworthian, and could hardly be independent of that original; but Browning's moral was not Wordsworth's. According to Browning, youth was wrong. Youth had loved its landscape 'palpably fire-clothed'; but falsely, since the fire was its own. It is better to see things naked, just as they are, than to clothe them even with fire. That, said Browning, was a poet's last vision and also his best. Why? Because, although God is in the bush, the bush is not consumed. God is above Nature, not fused with Nature, and Nature should not be fused with a poet's fancies. The more austere vision of age is also the truer:

The purged ear apprehends
Earth's import, not the eye late dazed.
The Voice said 'Call my works thy friends',
At Nature dost thou shrink amazed? .
God is it who transcends.

Chapter X

HARDY'S *THE DYNASTS*

FATALISM, predestination and determinism are terms which, purporting to be simple descriptions of a straight piece of metaphysical, theological or scientific exegesis, are commonly supercharged with human emotion to such an extent that their supposed consequences, and particularly the dreariness and despair which they are often thought to betoken, overshadow the plain meaning of terms which should themselves be plain. Some attempt should be made to understand these conceptions and their simpler implications before any one—poet, critic or common man—either accepts or rejects them. Nothing is easier than to let vague presumption take the place of sense and reason and, as a result, to labour and wallow in a sea of emotions which fancy or inadvertence may have stirred.

A fatalist, in the colloquial sense of the word, is a man who believes that all the major issues in his own life and in the collective affairs of humanity are settled for him or for his race not by him or by his race. He therefore infers that neither he nor his species can do anything about it. An attitude of small-scale practical fatalism frequently comes about when a man or a small group of men, having been accustomed, as they suppose, to manage their own affairs, discover that some major event such as war, pestilence, earthquake or the world-depression of industry makes extensive planning or scheming futile on their part. They then may become fatalists, that is to say, trust to luck, or, dis-trusting everything including themselves, just take what comes. Such small-scale 'fatalism' is easy to understand and, in substance, may be thoroughly sensible. Events, in a big way, may really have got beyond such people's control. There is nothing speculative about the matter. Philosophical fatalism, however, is

another story. It is the doctrine that little, and, in the extreme case *nothing*, that a man may dream he does of his own volition and initiative at any time makes the slightest difference to anything that happens either to himself or to any other person or thing. And similarly of nations, dynasties or other human groups, however boastful they may be about their seeming strength or greatness.

Determinism is a totally different doctrine, although it is often confused with fatalism in the sense described above. Put quite simply, determinism is the doctrine that every event, including every human action, is the inevitable result, in every feature and in every detail, of preceding events and, by the same logic, is itself a determinant of what comes later. All that happens, without remainder or qualification, is caused by what went before and in its turn is a cause of what is going to happen.

Determinism is confused with fatalism when 'being caused' or 'being inevitable' is negligently translated into 'having no choice', into what happens to a man, will-he, nill-he. The proper inference is not that there is no choice, or that choice is ineffective, but that the choice is *caused* and, in its turn, itself a cause, that is, effective. It is not a matter of being forced to do this or that against one's will, or willy-nilly. It is simply a matter of one's will having its causes, internal or external, like everything else. This, so far from implying that men's volitions have *no* effect, implies that human volitions *are* causes as well as effects. True, no man ultimately makes himself. Ultimately, therefore, every man's caused actions are the result of events which happened before he was born. He is a cause only when he is a going concern. There was a time before there was any 'he' to go. Since, however, nobody in his senses supposes that he made himself, or that the universe began with him, or that *he* could do anything *except* when he was a going concern, it is not plain why so much fuss should be made about this particular aspect of the affair.

The term 'predestination', while it may not, strictly speaking, connote anything not discussed in the foregoing remarks, may

arouse ulterior suggestions. As we have seen, determinism implies that whatever occurs at any moment was predetermined before that moment. To say it was predestined, if this be to say anything more than that it was predetermined, is to say something more about 'destiny' and to add it to determinism. This addition, if there be any addition, is usually the addition of fatalism to determinism. Fate and destiny are identified, and so we are informed that all human actions and (so-called) 'struggles' are overridden, are made into things of naught, by superhuman causes. If this overriding power be conscious it predestines consciously. If personal, it predestines personally. If unconscious, it predestines unconsciously. If impersonal, it predestines impersonally.

Clearly this attempt to add fatalism to determinism raises the prior question whether the two *can* be conjoined. In certain ways they cannot. It is inconsistent with determinism to maintain that human actions (or anything else) are caused but do not themselves cause anything. All that can be consistently maintained by a would-be fatalist who is also a determinist is that although human actions do have effects, effects quite as genuine as human beings themselves, these effects are tiny and trivial just as human beings are. This may or may not be true. Men's forces are astronomically puny, men's lives brief. If that settles the matter, so be it. If not, not.

Hardy's *The Dynasts* heaves uneasily in the wash of these conceptions, never clearly distinguishing their separate currents and components and offering in consequence a troubled perspective to every serious reader who is eager for a clue and a philosophy.

In his preface Hardy says that the 'impersonal abstractions' which supply his philosophical comments on the panorama of Europe during its anguish in Napoleon's days are only 'tentative' and 'advanced with little eye to a systematized philosophy' warranted to lift "the burthen of the mystery" of this unintelligible world'. All he will positively affirm, he goes on to

say, is that 'in this twentieth century' and 'even in verse' the world-philosophy implied in the 'antique mythology' of, say, *Paradise Lost* or of the *Eddas* must be definitively abandoned and replaced by a newer imaginative mythology suitable to 'the monistic theory of the universe' now so widely prevalent.

These prefatory explanations are rather curious. An imaginative mythology, frankly recognized to be such, is not literal truth and aesthetically is justified by its success, that is to say, is justified if it quickens the action, brings grandeur with it, envelops the whole with the vital tension of a deep comprehensive gravity. Such effects, however, are unlikely to be induced if the reader, while he reads, regards the mythology, whether new or not so new, simply as a fairy story. For the time being at least, the reader must be able to accept the mythology, not necessarily as science, but substantially as truth. If a twentieth-century monistic determinist continues to admire *Paradise Lost* or Goethe's adaptations of the Book of Job in his prologue to *Faust* he must put his modernity into atavistic suspense, and escape for the moment into a more ancient climate of belief. Hardy would have none of that. Exaggerating the extent to which monistic determinism, mechanistically conceived, has actually gripped the imaginations even of those who assent speculatively to such a doctrine, he resolved to supply a mythology—if indeed his own 'mythology' deserves so dignified a name—which would be in keeping with what he believed to be the proven world-outlook of those who had minds to give to such matters and had tried to make use of their minds.

This being understood, Hardy's modest statement that he had 'little eye to a systematized philosophy' is, in one way, proper and even right. He was making a beginning with the attempt to provide a new imaginative setting capable of replacing the opulent magnificence of the old Christian anthropocosmology, and even if he had not been humble could scarcely expect, all alone, to provide a pattern which vied with the rich and splendid tradition he discarded, a tradition inherited from so many great

minds. On the other hand, unless Hardy actually did what he disclaimed doing, it would seem that he had little or no excuse for introducing any mythology at all, let alone for making such extensive use of it, beginning and ending with it, interspersing it as a running commentary throughout the poem, and, indeed, using the mythology as the integrating agent of the whole piece which, without the mythology, would be, as Hardy himself said, only a 'chronicle-piece' and a 'panoramic show', not a 'completely organic structure of action and closely webbed development of character and motive'.¹ The whole point of his monistic mythology is to give truth and coherence, in other words 'systematized philosophy', to a scattered collection of episodes, doing so *sub specie imaginationis* but still doing it. True, there may, in the end, be little that is imaginative in the reflections and the recitatives of Hardy's superhuman but sub-cosmic aerial spirits. They either make bald metaphysical pronunciamientos or lament when they do not mock the futility of humanitarian sentiments. That, however, is not, and does not so much as appear to be a dearth of 'systematized philosophy'. It is only an imaginative debility.

What was Hardy's new monistic or, more specifically, his new mechanistic-determinist mythology?

In the Fore Scene, the After Scene and throughout the poem 'It', the Primal Source, never speaks. That is as it should be for 'It' does not think. 'It' and Its ways, however, are interpreted by the Ancient Spirit of the Years, in short by the *Zeitgeist*; and this being, whom I shall call *Y* for brevity's sake, is pretty voluble and is thoroughly repetitious throughout the poem. In contrast with *Y*, the Spirit of the Pities (let us call it *P* in the sequel) voices man's all-too-sentimental, all-too-human, all-too-Christian comments upon what *Y* says about 'It'. The other phantasmal commentators need not be considered except incidentally. The Spirit of the Earth is planetary at the best and therefore trivial. The Spirits Ironical and Sinister are a sort of author's

¹ Preface I, p. ix.

reserve for the expression of opinions not wholly suitable either for *Y* or for *P*. In effect the running commentary of the Upper Air, in all its principal stages, is a prolonged dialogue between *Y* and *P*, between the new mythology of science, keeping very close to discovered truth though itself more largely speculative than any science, and the old outmoded over-humanized Christian world-view.

Let us consider what we are told in the Fore Scene.

According to *Y*:

‘It’ works unconsciously as heretofore
Eternal artistries in Circumstance
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim
And not their consequence.

‘It’ always works by ‘clock-like laws’. Some have fancied, indeed, that ‘It’ grew tired of planetary affairs, having once had some relish for them; but that and its like is a needless gloss, almost certainly false. The Will (i.e. ‘It’) works in ‘skilled un-mindfulness’ ‘like a knitter drowsed’. *Y*’s proper business—for *Y* knows what a philosopher should be—is only to register ‘Its’ ways, not to cooperate with ‘It’ or to censure ‘It’, to ‘view not urge’, not to take sides, not to waste pity, only to note the manner in which ‘It’

Its hand upwinds
To click-clack off its preadjusted laws.

The most that *Y* can do, and then only by a supreme occasional effort after piercing imaginative clarity, is to envisage a not too inept similitude of ‘Its’ essential mode of operation. In such a mystical vision ‘It’ is seen to be a vast unconscious brain, ‘strange waves like minds grown visible’:

These are the Prime Volitions—fibrils, veins,
Will-tissues, nerves, the pulses of the Cause
That heave throughout the Earth’s compositure.
Their sum is like the lobule of a Brain

Evolving always what it wots not of;
 A Brain whose whole connotes the Everywhere,
 And whose procedure may but be discerned
 By phantom eyes like ours; the while unguessed
 Of those it stirs, who (even as ye do) dream
 Their motions free, their orderings supreme;
 Each life apart from each, with power to mete
 Its own day's measures; balanced, self-complete;
 Though they subsist but atoms of the One
 Labouring through all, divisible from none;
 But this no further now. Deem yet man's deeds self-done.

Such is *Y*'s simple philosophy. The whole is an organism, but the *anima mundi* is a brain not a mind. It is an Unconscious Will, 'unconscious' because it does not think or plan, a 'will' for no very obvious reason unless 'will' is simply (and fondly) identified with every sort of doing. To make matters worse, a bad analogy is offered, namely the way in which a habit like knitting, once it is formed, may be able to dispense with the conscious attention to purl and plain which was essential when the habit was in the making. The conclusion is said to be that we are mistaken in believing that even the most self-conscious of our voluntary actions are in any significant sense 'self-done'. They are done by the Whole, by 'It'. In other words, fatalism is deduced from deterministic premisses. The Whole is said to 'override' its parts, to admit the parts, it would seem, as constituent entities, but to deny their constituent operation, a doctrine which is not good physics, not good logic, not good sense.

P instead of challenging *Y*'s metaphysics makes a series of interjections which are not much more than sentimental bleats. *P* does not like unconscious 'artistry' (would *P* deny grace and beauty to the ferny patterns on a frost-decked window pane?). *P* wants to know *why* 'It' acts thus and thus, although *Y*, without any argument, has peremptorily rejected final causes despite his maladroitness and probably muddleheaded retention of the term 'Will'. *P* hopes that the Universe, like Burns's 'auld Hornie, Nick or Clootie' will eventually 'tak a thocht and mend', i.e., in

more pedantic language, that (the unconscious *nîsus* in the world-process will later achieve purposive self-consciousness and then will direct itself wittingly towards the right and the good, becoming compassionate and mild.)

There is little further development of these views throughout the drama nor any considerable change at its close. Let us turn to the After Scene.

Y avers that the Napoleonic drama has shown how the Great Foresightless 'mechanized in blank entrancement'. To be sure, Europe and indeed the whole Earth were only a flying riband of 'It's' web. Astronomy saw to that. The whole play, if play it could be called, is evidence of mere purposelessness. *Y* demands of *P* what *P* would have had instead, if *Y*'s 'showings' were mistaken after all. As before, *P*, in reply, hopes that 'It' will become advertent as evolution proceeds. *P* would like 'It' to become a Well-willer, not a mere Will, and even to have the right to believe that 'It', although apparently asleep, had always been advertent, that 'It's' 'mild-eyed consciousness' had always been on the side of the good and, in detail, had been opposed to the dynasts whom it hurled to destruction.

To this *Y* retorts that he is not impressed by 'half-convinced Compassionates and fond'. In ancient times *Y* also had had such dreams, had wondered whether that 'dumb, dark thing' might not have some good purpose to fulfil, and was not an aimless hocus-pocus. So he understood what *P* would be at. He had a certain wistful regret for the futility of such dreams. But he himself had put away childish ideas.

Thus Science (Hardy supposed) sadly but inexorably rebuked the false sentimentalism and the naïve humanism of pre-scientific world-views.

Such is the general philosophy of the drama. I shall now attempt to make certain incursions into the drama itself with the object partly of confirming what has already been said, partly of exploring some nicer points in a more leisurely fashion. — —

(1) As I have said, the moments of supreme importance in

the drama are marked by a vision of the Will, conceived as a mindless cosmic brain and described by *Y* in the lines already quoted. In the actual drama even *Y* does not avail himself of this device. The *poet* describes such visions in his stage directions for dumb show. Thus the vision is a stage effect superadded to the action at the close of Napoleon's coronation at Milan, just before Austerlitz, before Wagram, at the start of the Russian campaign, at the crisis of the Battle of Waterloo where, it is said, 'the web connecting all the apparently separate shapes includes Wellington in its tissue with the rest and shows him, like them, as acting while discovering his intentions to act', i.e. where Hardy reminds his English readers that even England is but a part of the cosmos.

Consequently, since the drama was meant to be read not acted, this vision of the *cerebrum mundi* cannot have a very stirring incidence. It is only a historian's comment made after the event. Perhaps wisely, Hardy seldom tries to describe any sympathetic convulsion of nature at these historically fateful moments, although in the older mythologies tempest, earthquake and great non-natural darkness were deemed appropriate to such events and therefore were declared to occur. A consistent monist is prudent if he avoids such extravagances. But Hardy did not always avoid them. At Albuera he suggests that the Will became almost excited

With weird unrest along the firmament
Of causal coils in passionate display

and at the beginning of Napoleon's Russian retreat Nature's muteness was said to match Moscow's.

Thus, on the whole, the vision of the *cerebrum mundi*, and any of its appurtenances are only a historian's after-knowledge, described in footnotes, and neither dramatically nor philosophically integrated with the dramatic panorama.

- ✓ (2) In several passages, as we might expect, the substance of the thought is simply man's insignificance judged by astronomical standards.

Thus in the account of the coronation at Milan we are told of

A local thing called Christianity
Which the wild dramas of this whirling sphere
Include, with divers other such, in dim
Pathetical and brief parentheses
Beyond whose reach, uninfluenced, unconcerned
The systems of the suns go sweeping on
With all their many-mortaled planet train
In mathematic roll unceasingly.

Similarly, after Pitt's death, we learn that

Our readings Why and Whence
Are but the flower of man's intelligence
And this but an unreckoned incident
Of the all-urging Will, raptly magnipotent.

When the poor mad King of England betook himself to prayer the Ironic Spirits sang:

Ha! ha! That's good. He'll pray to It!
But where do Its compassions sit?
Yea where abides the heart of It?

Is it where sky-fires flame and flit
Or solar craters spew and spit
Or ultra-stellar night-webs knit?

What is Its shape? Man's counterfeit
That turns in some far sphere unlit
The Wheel which drives the Infinite?

Such comments, from Hardy's monistic standpoint, were legitimate and even inevitable. His rhetoric seldom failed him, and it could be impressive. The same conclusion, however, might be reached by dozens of other philosophies in violent conflict with him.

✓(3) Sometimes the contrast, and such fatalism as there is, refer not to anything astronomical, but to dynasts and the common people. In most such passages the people are the puppets and the dynasts not puppets at all. Thus we read:

Alas! what prayer will serve the struggling lands
Whose lines are ninepins to their bowling hands?

Again the German people at its national rising was said to be

Unconscious well nigh as the Will

Of its part.

Would it wholly not be so and feel not the following smart;

and just before Corunna an English deserter is made to say 'Good Lord deliver us from all great men and take me back again to humble life'. Again, we are asked during the account of Waterloo

Is this the Esdraelon of a moil
For mortal man's effacement?

and receive the reply

Warfare mere
Plied by the Managed for the Managers
To wit; by fellow folks who profit nought
For those who profit all.

This answer, however, is an answer of the Ironie Spirits to *P* and the statement about the ninepins as well as its successor are *P*'s statements also. *Y* is innocent of them, and need not be supposed to have dabbled in such thoughts.

On the other hand, when Napoleon says that

The Bourbon throne is illegitimate
Because not founded on the people's will

he is saying in effect that the dynasts are the managed, the people the managers.

(4) A rather odd point is the repeated suggestion that there is a logical inconsistency if any sentience at all exists in a mechanized universe. I call the suggestion odd because, if there were such an inconsistency, mechanism would have to be abandoned forthwith, since there is no doubt at all that human beings do have their feelings. The question for an interpreter is whether this ostensible logical inconsistency is supposed to be only a crotchet of *P*'s or something more substantial.

Certainly the view is *P*'s. He says:

Things mechanized
By coils and pivots set to foreframed codes

Would in a thorough-sphered melodic rule
 And governance of sweet consistency
 Be cessed no pain whose burnings would abide
 With That Which holds responsibility,
 Or inexist.

There the alleged inconsistency is moral not merely logical. The innocent should not suffer for what is not their fault. Here *Y* has no doubt about the answer. He says:

The cognizance ye mourn Life's doom to feel
 If I report it meetly, came unmeant,
 Emerging with blind gropes from impercipient
 By random sequence—luckless, tragic Chance
 If ye will call it so.

Y, however, was not always quite so clear. Indeed when the Spirit of the Earth suggested that 'uncreation' were a better thing than all this human misery he replied rather feebly:

Nay something hidden urged
 The giving matter motion; and these coils
 Are, maybe, good as any;

and had to admit that *P* had scored a debating point when he took him to task:

How ask the aim of unrelaxing Will
 Trained in its purpose to unknowingness?

It is difficult, however, to avoid the suspicion that Hardy thought there was a logical as well as a moral difficulty at this point. In one passage¹ the Spirit of the Earth says:

Yes: that they feel and puppetry remain
 Is an owned flaw in her consistency
 Men love to dub Dame Nature.

Consider, again, the argument after Mack's defeat at Ulm.

The Ironic Spirits suggest that 'It' might afford a smile. *Y* rebukes them: 'It is impassable as glacial snow', he says. *P* jibs at that and exclaims:

But O the intolerable antilogy
 Of making figments feel

¹ 1, 54.

and his comment has the support of the Ironic Spirits who remark: 'There's logic in that.' So there is. Figments cannot 'really' feel since, being but figments, they cannot 'really' do or suffer anything. It may be doubted, however, whether Hardy was thinking here of the contrast between real puppets and unreal figments, and, indeed, whether, in the context, 'figments' does not mean 'artefacts'.

(5) Regarding this matter of puppetry it is to be remarked that in common experience we distinguish quite readily between a puppet show and what is not a puppet show whether the latter is played by living actors on the boards or enacted by persons who are not playactors at all. Consequently, if all human nature is puppetry, much of it is a different type of puppetry from the jerkings of jerked marionettes. In the same way, if any of Hardy's characters avers that he or she is a puppet, the meaning is that he or she is not as others are. Thus when Marie Louise says:

A puppet I by force inflexible
Was bid to wed Napoleon at a nod

her meaning was that, unlike many other brides, she was not a 'free' agent and that, whatever her nominal rights may have been, she was compelled in fact to do what her father and Metternich wanted. (Even that would, strictly, be quite different from literal puppetry.)

In the main Hardy's *dramatis personae* do not regard themselves as puppets in Marie Louise's sense and speak the language of self-determining agents. Even if this was their tragic mistake, some explanation should be given of the empirical difference between what they thought was free action and what they thought was puppetry. Hardy does not explain. Indeed he frequently describes them as free agents, and does not merely make them speak as if they were.

Sometimes, it is true, the point is doubtful. After the account, early in the narrative, of the Parliamentary debate that preceded England's entry into the war, *P* says:

It irks me that they thus should Yea and Nay,
 As though a power lay in their oraclings,
 If each decision work unconsciously
 And would be operant though unloosened were
 A single lip.

In other words *P* evidently thought that monism implied the total inefficacy of all thoughts and expressions of thought; but *Y*'s comment is only that the vote was determined in advance by the party managers, whatever the speakers might say, an opinion that requires no metaphysics. For the most part, Hardy's account of the Berlin decrees, of the use of John Bull's gold, of the long duel between Pitt and Napoleon does not read like an account of the devices of undevising puppets and he describes the deployment of the French armies at Charleroi as 'one great movement coordinated by one mind'. Quite unlike Tolstoi in *War and Peace*, he never attempts to say that Napoleon's battles, so to put it, fought themselves, and that their direction by a master mind is simply a figment of the historians. According to Hardy the controllers did control, at any rate proximately, even if, ultimately, they could be 'shown' to be controlled by 'It'. When Pitt says that England has saved herself, *Y* praises the sentiment and holds that Pitt's words 'will spread with ageing' throughout England's future, being supremely fitted 'to hold the imagination of this strenuous race'. True, *Y* also says in the context that such was 'Its' unconscious will; and Hardy tells us in other places that 'It' was on England's (perhaps on Wessex's) side:

But the weaving Will from eternity
 Hemming them in by a circling sea
 Evolved the fleet of the Englishry

—as if the English had nothing to do with their navy. But if Hardy was not proud of Pitt, and of the fight of the 'strenuous' English against 'empire-making lust and personal gain', the English language has no meaning.

(6) No doubt if it could be 'shown' (as Hardy claimed) that 'It' disposed the entire action, overruling all the dynasts and all

their dupes without the least regard to what the said dupes and dynasts believed they were effecting, this great lesson might be all the more effective if the ignorance of the agents about the true causes of things were demonstrated at the same time. Our question must be whether Hardy's poem really did 'show', and show clearly, what, in this matter, it frequently professed to 'show'.

The answer, I think, is that the lesson is far from plain. In his picture some of the agents believe themselves to be masters of their destiny, and some waver. Biographically, the fact very likely was so, but I have not been able to discover that either these false beliefs, or these waverings, or any true beliefs that the agents may have had are 'shown' by the action to demonstrate the claims made for 'It'. In this regard Napoleon's actions should be, and are meant to be the most significant, and I shall try to examine the question whether Hardy's account of the wavering fatalism in Napoleon's state of mind really does convey any kind of indirect 'demonstration' of the truth of mechanistic monism. Substantially the answer should be given by Napoleon's statements themselves.

In the poem Napoleon's final comment on the whole business was neutral in this matter:

Great men are meteors that consume themselves
To light the earth. This is my burnt out hour

and very often his sentiments were anti-fatalistic. "'Tis all a duel 'twixt this Pitt and me' he said, just as if he were a mediaeval knight making his own personal challenge with his own personal gage. At the conclusion of the Russian campaign he told his Empress: 'Not Russia but God's sky has conquered me'—which is only a surrender to General Winter. At the outset of the Russian campaign he told his troops:

Soldiers, wild war is on the board again

Russia is forced on by fatality,

She says her destiny must be outwrought,
 Meaning at our expense. Does she then dream
 We are no more the men of Austerlitz
 With nothing left of our old featfulness?

No doubt a consistent philosophy is seldom the stuff to give the troops on such occasions; but a conqueror's fatalism would have been quite appropriate. Victory must be ours. You will be swept into it irresistibly.

Some of the quasi-fatalism is just superstition. The absence of the Italian cardinals at Napoleon's wedding with Marie Louise was thought to be a sinister portent. 'They shall smart for it' said Napoleon. The fall of Marie Antoinette's portrait in her apartment in the Tuileries could not have been encouraging to the new Empress of France, but Hardy, just to show that superstition played no part in his philosophy, makes *Y* put the event into its proper perspective. *Y* is quite brutal. When the portrait fell, the former Queen, once an Austrian princess, was decaying (he says) in a back garden. 'No trump unsepulchres sealed souls to-day.'

Even the passages in which Napoleon professes to be overruled by his destiny usually contain some loopholes of dubiety, permitting if not encouraging alternative ways of thinking.

There is rather an odd instance in Hardy's account of the diplomatic festivities after the Prussian defeat at Jena. Napoleon very nearly succumbs to beauty in distress and is within an ace of restoring Magdeburg to Prussia in gallant tribute to the tears so very close to the Queen of Prussia's lovely blue eyes. But he subdues the impulse, greatly to Talleyrand's relief, and says:

Some fate within me, baffling mine intent
 Hurries me onwards whether I will or no.
 My star, my star is what's to blame—not I.
 It is unswervable.

Napoleon's star, it would seem, here vetoes what is partly a temptation of gallantry, partly an upstart's tribute to the prestige

of established dynasties made human in ceremony. *Y*'s comment is:

He spoke thus at the Bridge of Lodi. Strange
He's of the few in Europe who discern
The workings of the Will;

whereupon *P* interposes:

If that be so
Better for Europe lacked he such discerning.

Hardy's intention, no doubt, may again be to expose *P*'s silliness. If it is the Will, not Napoleon, which settles the course of European history, Napoleon's discerning or non-discerning has nothing to do with the case. At this point, however, *Y* makes no rejoinder to *P*.

In some other cases Napoleon's assertions of fatalism are clearly subphilosophical. If Destiny foiled his attempt at suicide (as he said it did) the line between fate and superstition seems to be pretty slender, and fate's intervention, to parody a theological term, resembles a Particular Improvidence rather than the General Improvidence of 'It'. (In the poem *Y*, though not 'It', is guilty of this inconsistency when he incites Villeneuve to suicide.) Similarly when Napoleon tells Josephine:

We are but thistle globes on heaven's high gates
And whither blows or whence or how or why
Can choose us not at all.

he is arguing *ad feminam* with a superstitious woman who spoke of herself as his guardian angel and 'Dame Nature'. In any case Napoleon, so far from leaving the succession to fate, was bent upon producing an heir in the very ordinary human way. Again Napoleon's guilty dreams about the Duc d'Enghien, in the ferment of his spirits before Waterloo, need not be more than a surface fatalism, a mere shift for the thinner kind of self-exculpation:

Why, why should this reproach be dealt me now,
Why hold me my own master, if I be
Ruled by the pitiless Planet of Destiny?

In the drama, Napoleon's clearest statement of pure fatalism occurs at the most critical stage of his fortunes, the opening of the disastrous campaign in Russia: and Hardy notes that Napoleon spoke 'with sudden despondency':

That which has worked will work.—Since Lodi Bridge
 The force I then felt move me moves me on
 Whether I will or no: and oftentimes
 Against my better mind.... Why am I here?
 —By laws imposed on me inexorably.
 History makes use of me to weave her web
 To her long while aforesaid-figured mesh
 And contemplated character; no more.
 Well, war's my trade, and whencesoever springs
 This one in hand, they'll label it with my name.

That is an amalgam of determinism and fatalism, approaching consistency more closely than anything else that Napoleon is made to say in the drama. As I have tried to show, however, it is not the uniform tenor of what Napoleon says. And if this speech were consistent or near-consistent, it is difficult to believe that the actions as opposed to the words or the beliefs of Napoleon and of the other agents would demonstrate its truth or near-truth in any convincing way.

Chapter XI

ROBERT BRIDGES AND *THE TESTAMENT OF BEAUTY*

MANY POEMS have been permeated by a philosophical spirit, and there are several from which a distinctive core of argued and arguable philosophy can be extracted. There are also poems like the Book of Job which deal expressly with a major philosophical theme in their own dramatic way. Such poems, in one sense of the words, are philosophical poems. It is rare, however, for any poet so to discipline his Muse as to make it plough a straight philosophical furrow, reasoned, systematic and even academical in one of the better senses of that adjective. Not many literatures have a Lucretius.

Certainly, it would be rash to assert that any theme is wholly incapable of poetic treatment, and if there were such a recalcitrant theme it could not be man's place in the cosmos, or the cosmos itself, or the hyper-cosmical vestiges to be discerned in what we call the cosmos. For these prospects may surely move a poet intensely and may peremptorily incite him to express himself with kindled imaginative gravity and measured resonance. The question is whether *he* is so moved, not whether some other poets and many other people are chilled, repelled or bewildered by such topics. Lucretius *might* have been moved by the Epicurean philosophy in all its austerity, and not, or only incidentally, by its 'human' aspects—deliverance from supernatural terrors, from unworthy fears, from craven endeavours to forget that things are what they are. But, as it happened, the theme Bridges chose for his swan song was quite humanely 'human'. He dealt with the spiritual habitat of man's aspiring soul. He could not accept the ~~pettiness~~ of Christian mythology and theology quite in the spirit of Dante or of Milton. His faith was more scientific than theirs

and of a different metaphysical stamp; but their theme, very largely, was his also, and no one can say that they chose foolishly.

Still even in their case, as in Lucretius's, one may raise the question whether a happy marriage can be arranged, even by heaven, between poetry of the one part and accurate, systematic philosophy of the other part. Space may well be a poetical theme, but Euclid's treatment of it might not be easily incorporated into a poem; and parts of *The Testament of Beauty* are what they have to be—straight, sober, earnest, philosophical argument. Here *solvitur canendo* is the only possible answer. We really do not know what *could not* happen on Mount Helicon.

We may allow, however, that there is something cruel in the fact that the writer of a philosophy-poem or of a poem-philosophy, written on an adequate scale, inevitably is in the company of Lucretius, and invites comparison with that poet of genius. The philosopher in such a writer may easily be moved towards a better philosophy than the atomism of Titus Lucretius Carus; the poet in him has to be very bold, so bold that it is inhuman not to applaud his courage. When *The Testament of Beauty* appeared in 1929 many good judges, or at any rate many highly competent philosophers who were also men of lettered taste, believed that genius had prevailed, that there was greatness in the philosophy and in the poem too. In the intervening years we have heard less about that. I have not found that any considerable number of English-writing philosophers have used the *Testament* as a fountain of living waters, and I do not think (though here I must speak with diffidence) that the poem has mingled substantially with the main current of English letters.

If it has not, what is the reason? One reason may be the complexity, the austerity and even the bookishness of the philosophy. Discussion of that point will be the employment of most of this essay. Another reason may be the metre. If it takes a skilled prosodist as well as a skilled philosopher to appreciate the poem, there are not so very many readers who *could* appreciate it.

I shall say something about this second reason now, and shall not return to it.

Writing to S. Alexander who had said that the metre, the 'loose Alexandrines', of the poem contributed largely to the poem's essential success, Bridges said: '*That is absolutely true*', and went on to say that the invention of the metre was 'a logical process'.¹ This 'logic' had connections with the theme of the poem but, in the main, was more general. The prosody was meant to be neo-Miltonic, an extension of Milton's use of syllabic verse, but written in twelves. The extension was the 'freeing' of the last foot in the line. In Miltonic verse according to Bridges, after very careful study, the caesural break was free, not fixed, and all the feet were free except the last, that is to say, except in the last foot no place in the line required long or short, accented or unaccented, heavy or light.² Bridges extended this freedom to the last foot also.

Thus the metre was very free, 'there being no speech rhythm which it would not admit'.³ There should be a vast gain in the fluidity and rapidity of the verses. It should never be necessary to make a fool of a word by stressing or otherwise ill-treating it in an unnatural way, and elisions, within reason, were at the discretion of the reader. The hope was that the reader would be able to rid himself of preconceived hampering expectations. Speaking of one of his earlier experiments Bridges wrote to a friend: 'The great difficulty that the metre seeks to combat the typical rhythm, and that the reader looks for it, can never be got over. Nothing would induce me to make the feet show too plainly.'⁴ But the feet were there. There was no resemblance to the fabled Bird of Paradise which had no feet. As Bridges argued in one of his essays, poetry must not only be eurhythmic, like prose, but also, unlike prose, must have 'a predetermined organic normal scheme

¹ *Literary and Philosophical Pieces*, p. 86 n.

² *Collected Essays, Papers, etc. of Robert Bridges*, xv, 'New Verse', p. 87.

³ *Ibid.* p. 90.

⁴ *Correspondence of Robert Bridges and Henry Bradley*, p. 17.

for its lines'.¹ There must be 'greater expectancy' in it than in prose, the rhythm being 'more marked and predetermined and confined'.²

Such, in general, was the principle of these 'loose Alexandrines'. Readers who are able to renounce false expectations should be rewarded accordingly, and Bridges hoped that they would be, just as in some earlier experiments he had found that 'some 4 or 5 ladies who had none of them the least notion of the rules were all of them independently enthusiastic with the material result and said they liked it better than any other metre they had ever come across!!!'.³ We are not told on that occasion whether the ladies had the verses read to them, or read for themselves. The difference profoundly affects the experiment. If the reader, like Bridges, had not only a sensitive ear, but also a life-long affection for the values and the beauties of words, his disciplined freedom would also be the hearer's delight. Other readers, indisciplined in the proper use of their freedom, might simply be puzzled, time and again. Every reader of the *Testament*, I think, can discover lines and sequences of lines whose music is not to be missed. Most can go a long way towards unthinking what they should never have thought; but I do not think it is easy to read the entire poem, in the way in which, no doubt, it should be read.

I shall now attempt to give an analysis of the philosophy of the poem. Since the poem itself is very condensed, containing only 4374 lines, i.e. less than 40,000 words, a further condensation of its argument is likely to do it violence. The man who can condense his 'Essentials of Spiritual Philosophy' into a small booklet in any medium has already compressed his thought into dangerously small compass. But let that pass. I shall deal with the four books of the poem: Introduction, Self-hood, Breed and Ethick *seriatim*, beginning with an account of the main argument and then making certain comments.

¹ *Collected Essays, etc.*, II, p. 52.

² *Ibid.* p. 38.

³ To Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 22.

I

Book I, the Introduction, is itself subdivided into two parts. In the first Bridges introduces his readers to the Higher Naturalism. 'Late in his long journey', as it were from a hill-top with the recovered innocence of a child's wondering eye he 'felt the domination of Nature's secret urge, And happy escape therein'. Man's reason is 'in deep insolvency to sense'. He is a lover of beauty; his happiness is to respond lovingly to Nature. Why then so much ugliness? We should not ask *why* Nature is thus and thus, come the moralist over her. When we judge Nature, Nature is judging herself in us. We should only ask *what* Nature is. We should also remember how reason is 'in all her plans so small and tickle a thing'. So small. Conscient reason is to the universal and largely inconscient Mind of the Universe as the skin of a peach to its pulp. So 'tickle' and delicate. Life itself, to say nothing of rational life, is spent on a razor edge. And human reason is a dimension of nature, not something contranatural. It enlarges and refines what is less conscient in the brutes and inconscient beneath them. Again, man's tendency to decry mere 'Nature' is evidence of the divine principle implicit in all life. It refutes the 'lower ethic' which holds that spiritual ideals are only dreams. But the highest ethic is still Nature's ethic. St Francis, for all the spiritual dedication of his life, rightly called the moon his sister. Let us rejoice in the sensuous treasures of the earth, in her grandeur, her turbulence and her repose with all the wonder of our and the race's childhood.

The second part of the Introduction reverts to the discarded question 'Why?' and is more intricate. If man has a distinctive function that must be his distinctive 'purpose' in Nature, and what can this purpose be except conscient reason and desire for knowledge? Unscientific philosophers who sever appearances from reality pervert the truth just as sadly as unphilosophical Scientists who affirm that ideas are dreams. The sceptic has his legitimate office but God has confuted him with I AM THAT I AM.

The truth is *Natura sive Deus*. There is gradation everywhere, atomic, organic, sensuous and self-conscious. Indeed Leibniz was right in holding that everything has all of these. There are no barriers between percipience and impercipience,

tho' in our schools of thought 'unconscious mind' is call'd
a contradiction in terms; as if the embranglements
of logic wer the prime condition of all Being.

Why should we prattle about the 'wonders of instinct'? Instinct is the rule not the exception even in ourselves. It is reason that is the 'picklock', the anomaly; and reason relies on axioms beyond her fathoming, impervious to her lock-picking, deep-set in Universal Mind. (Even St Thomas based his system upon a divine fiasco. He knew better when the mystic vision came to him; but then he abandoned philosophy.) Instinct, it is true, may be foolish like the lemmings of Norway which 'ate their way to the coast' and perished in the sea. But reason has had the same follies, as in the Second Crusade or among the Goths who plundered and vanished. 'True wisdom', however, cannot so be mocked; and the wise live by faith: 'faith in the order of Nature and that her order is good'; not by 'creeds and precise focusings of the unsearchable'. Not in Gizeh but in Athens wisdom first came into her kingdom. We have learned something since, something in music, something in mathematics, some alleviation of our 'animal poverty', despite our democratic follies. Again, the Athenian League betrayed its own political principles. It was Christ who showed us

God's kingdom, and his holy temple
not in Athens or Rome but in the heart of man;

and yet

The great light shineth in great darkness, the seed
that fell by the wayside hath been trodden under foot,
that which fell on the Rock is nigh wither'd away.
While loud and louder thro' the dazed head of the Sphinx
the old lion's voice roareth o'r all the lands.

I do not think that the Introduction needs very much commentary. The Higher Naturalism has a relatively easy task so long as it remains general. 'Nature' is all that there is. It therefore includes all interrogations of 'Nature'; and 'why' becomes 'what' when the 'what' of 'Nature' is expanded to its limit.

On the other hand, when naturalism condescends to be more particulate in its arguments, its difficulties commonly thicken. Its reply is that such clouds are passing mists, philosophically subordinate to the governing principle. It may be so, but, in Bridges's case, the special difficulties of several of the special arguments seem to be considerable. When he says that function implies purpose he is just 'why-ing' the 'what' of 'Nature', attempting to answer the very question he has ostentatiously disowned. When he says that criticism of Nature has to be self-criticism of Nature he need not be saying more than that *we*, the critics, are ourselves natural beings; and even if Nature or Nature's universal mind (if it had one) were the critic, does it follow that the critic, judging in its own case, must necessarily pass a favourable verdict? Since Bridges admits the existence and even the prevalence of ugliness, unwisdom and other evils in the world, he admits that the verdict need not be favourable, and his ultimate reliance upon faith in the dominance of goodness, sane and saining as such reliance may be, is consistent with a host of philosophies.

Still more in detail, the principle of gradation in Nature does not imply (whether or not Bridges had Leibniz to support him) that *every* natural unit contains *all* the levels of the gradation if only in some obscure form. And Bridges's elaborate arguments about 'reason' are not impressive. 'Reason' is 'small' he says. What has size to do with the matter? It is 'tickle'. What use would it be if it were *not* delicate? To say that its 'embranchments' may be neglected is just to say that contradictions do not matter, that philosophers are at liberty to talk the right kind of nonsense. But nonsense is always nonsense. To say that 'reason' has just to accept axioms with docility from extra-rational sources

is quite false if there be any axiom of which a rational man can say *per se patet*. As for instinct, there is more, much more, to come in the next books.

II

Book II, like Book I, is divided into two parts. In the first part the poet adapts the myth of Plato's *Phaedrus*, censuring Plato for his refusal to go below the surface. In the new version, Reason, as for Plato, is the charioteer, but the steeds for Bridges are Self-hood and Breed, i.e. individual self-maintenance and the reproductive principle. Being determined to probe deeper than Plato did, he asserts that the two steeds 'are the animal instincts in the birthright of man'. Breed, once the foal of Self-hood, is now her partner and more mettlesome. Each is naturally capable either of good or of evil. Therefore the team may be directed towards the good.

Self-hood is the elder because mere self-assertion is the main-spring of all existence. It is seen in the tree that competes with its seedlings for life, seen also in a python or in a sucking child. The 'autarchy' of self-hood is undeniable everywhere, and 'reason' dare not disown it anywhere. But it is capable of self-transcendence even in instinct. The wolf-pack selects its leader, and mother-wolves protect their cubs. The reason is that a mother regards her offspring as a part of herself. Thus love and compassion may by instinct supplant war and strife in the animals. In man we see 'in his Reason her (i.e. Nature's) patience as virtue reborn'; and human motherhood reaches heavenwards:

with the unseen universe communing and entranced strangely.

Leaving these heights, the poet returns to animal self-maintenance. Consider the bees. Marvellously sociable, they have rather a thin time of it. The individual bees may indeed be cells in a bee-organization (or is it in Universal Bee?). Such an organization would be less complex than many organisms; and bee-like instinct in the child is certainly prior to reason. Bees are

also useful in world-economy because of their dealing with pollen. Still their mass-production is unkind to their masses. It is 'penny-wise to serve a turn'; and it cannot excuse cheap socialistic sentimentalism. No doubt personal happiness is not everything. But it is something. Moreover, a child is an imaginative spirit, youth goes forth joyfully to brush evil aside, though, without faith, it will be utterly blighted, perhaps in war.

The second part of Book II pursues the same general theme at a higher dialectical level. Its problem is to be just to the cruder forms of *fighting* self-assertion, in mere animal pluck, say, or in war, and also to discover how a higher self-assertion achieves grandeur, wisdom and beauty.

Brasidas the Spartan general spared the little mouse which bit him in self-defence, thus honouring the rudiments of courage even in a timid beast. How much the more should the instinctive pugnacity of the male in defence of its offspring be honoured? Therefore children show a healthy frame of mind when they play at being soldiers and like their history to be bloody. Poetry, too, as in Homer, has always preferred the elder steed to the charioteer, though it is helped by time which may purge such tales of their unhappiness. Reason, condemning war and forgetting man's immemorial fighting spirit, may forget that reason ultimately is 'a helpless nursling of animal mind', sadly debilitated by its characteristic introspective doubts. Art is wiser because it is more healthily imaginative. Aristotle was wrong when he censured Platonic Ideas, and so was Zeno. Reason

owneth to existences beyond its grasp, whereon
its richer faculties depend.

and is a retainer to imaginative beauty.

Beauty is the highest of all these occult influences
the quality of appearances that thru' the sense
wakeneth spiritual emotion in the mind of man:
And Art, as it createth new forms of beauty,
awakeneth new ideas that advance the spirit
in the life of Reason to the wisdom of God.

Wisdom and Beauty are instinct become spiritual, and are largely the self-assertive instinct, savage so long as savagery remains, warlike so long as wars are necessary but capable, there, of 'heroism, self-sacrifice, disciplin'. A true soldier rebukes triviality as a Greek statue, in its superb nakedness, rebukes the guests at a politician's garden party. There is 'old self-hood' in war, an opportunity for the 'brave gamesters' in life. But 1914 which called for the risks of the old self-hood was less dangerous than 1918 which called for the risks of the newer, more civilized self-hood.

On the whole the argument of Book II, in both its dialectical stages, spoils a plausible case by perverse insistence upon a piece of pseudo-science. The general principle of Naturalism may be sound, namely that all grandeur rises from a quickening of the dust. The further principle that all such advance is the advance of a being which, as Spinoza said, perseveres *in esse suo* may also be sound, and involves the consequence that every virtue is a species of strength or toughness. The application of these principles to instinct is not necessary, and Bridges's way of applying them is not even tenable.

Plato's myth in the *Phaedrus* was meant to symbolize his tripartite division of the soul, a doctrine which Plato attempted to base upon solid argument, though not, perhaps, very convincingly. Bridges censures Plato for his vagueness. Plato, he says, was not a man who 'himself kenneth well of these things'. But Bridges the kenner achieves a muddle.

He vacillates, saying that 'self-hood' and 'breed' are ultimates and also that they are not ultimates since breed is self-hood's 'foal'. Parthenogenesis being allowed, why not any number of foals? The whole question is about origins scientifically traceable.

More importantly, 'self-hood' is not *an* instinct in the sense in which mating is an instinct. 'Self-hood' is a general name for all the tendencies which, when anything is a going concern, help to keep it going. In animals it is exemplified by *everything*—secretion, reflex, instinct, cunning or whatever it may be—which

is functionally useful for self-maintenance, and includes the pugnacity of the bulldog and the flight of the hare with equal ease.

Again, the sex instinct is an individual instinct and therefore a part of 'self-hood'. Bridges, discussing the bees, suggests that the hive, and not the several bees, is the proper unit, the 'self-hood' in question; but his anti-socialistic arguments are based on his belief that the individual bees have a raw deal. An even feebler argument is his contention that a mother-bird protecting her offspring regards them as part of herself.

War, pugnacity and courage should not be lumped together. Certainly, a courageous man is a courageous self; but, similarly, a compassionate man is a compassionate self. The mouse that bit Brasidas may have been a sheer individualist; a soldier, doing his bit in a concerted effort, need not be. Again self-assertion and self-sacrifice are contradictories; yet according to Bridges self-hood may generate self-sacrifice and still be self-hood.

As for 'reason', it is not true that 'reason' invariably condemns either violence or war, although a fairly high proportion of intellectuals may be pacifists. If the late Poet Laureate's arguments were sound they would by that very fact evince their rational character.

III

Book III, unlike all the others, has a simple theme. It deals with the sublimation of sex, with parallels from the sublimation of other appetites and accompanied by indications of other sinister possibilities. Accordingly no elaborate analysis is needed in its case, and running comments may safely be interspersed with a brief general exposition.

The poet begins by saying that both Breed and Self-hood 'are Ideas construed by the abstract intellect'. If so they are not instincts, and their derivation from instinct is no great matter. Later, it is true (at line 929), he likens each to a 'chemic element'

—which is a lapse. To call them (as at line 940) ‘The twin persistent semitones of my Grand Chant’ is very much better.

The sublimation of sex is introduced by the parallel possibilities of hunger (said to pertain to self-hood). In that instance, pleasure in food has a regrettable tendency to sink itself in gluttony, though the table may be civilized, and wine may almost be noble, not far short of a Stradivarius:

speaking with incantation of strange magic to charm
the dreams that yet undreamt lurk in the unfathom’d deep
of mind, unfeatured hopes and loves and dim desires
uttermost forms of all things that shall be.

In the main, however, the glutton, even if in part an artist, has to retire with ‘stomach Emeritus’, a fate which, for no very obvious reason, is held to be incomparably worse than the legs Emeriti of an ageing mountaineer.

After coquetting with the idea that breed is to the race as self-hood is to the individual, and denying that the eugenists have sufficient grounds for interfering with human mating, the poet proceeds to describe the dark origins of sex and the way in which it may but need not reach the light, ‘its divine exaltation and bestial abasement’. At the ideal Shakespeare’s commendation of Sylvia, ‘Holy fair and wise is she’, expresses the rank of its excellence:

giving to Soul
first place, thereafter to Body and last of the trine
Intelligence; and thatt is their right order in Love

though bodily beauty is but young love’s portal, and love may grow finer when the lovers are too old for the radiance of the flesh. Beauty’s allure should be studied, however, and so should the anomaly that feminine beauty is commonly ranked higher than male beauty, in defiance of the principles of aesthetics. In any case men should see

that love’s call to woman
is graver and more solemn than it can be to him
by reason of her higher function and duty therein.

Only so can the ideal of Christian marriage be fully understood and the vagaries of feminism be corrected, to say nothing of Sapphic perversions.

These truths are mistakenly challenged by the ascetics, as the two Essene wars showed in the history of Christendom, the first after the invasion of the Huns, the second in Provence when the Albigenses, these dour Manicheans, fell upon Count Raymond's jongleurs and troubadours, mistaking chivalry for corruption. The Italy which received the fleeing troubadours gave birth to Dante.

So beauty comes to high fruition in marriage, whatever beauty-blind science may aver to the contrary; and there is hope.

Verily if Hope wer not itself a happiness
sorrow would far outweigh our mortal joy, but Hope
incarnat in the blood kindleth its hue no less
with every breath, to flood all the sluices of life
long as the heart can beat.

For man there is no hope

but to attune
nature's diversity to a human harmony
and with faith in his hope and full courage of soul
realizing his will at one with all nature,
devise a spiritual ethic for conduct in life.

Asceticism, the poet thinks, finds its best confutation in the sensible realistic attitude of the common folk in England especially, as may be seen

in Shakespeare's drama, where ideal women walk
in worship, and the baser sort find sympathy,
And both are bravely stirr'd together as water and oil.

Men, indeed, may grope too much and need womanly divination to beckon them towards the empyrean. In any case:

From blind animal passion to the vision of Spirit
all actual gradations come of natur, and each
severally in time and place is answerable in man.

Titian's portrayal of Sacred and Profane Love has much to teach the teachable even if it is straining Titian's allegory to suppose that the child playing between the Loves, and stirring their reflections on the well, is meant to show the way in which Sacred and Profane mingle in Nature.

IV

The argument of Book IV, 'Ethick', is the most intricate and the most scholastic of all. It has two main divisions and an envoy.

In the first division it is argued that beauty, that 'pleasurable ichor of heaven', is vague but puissant in its primitive origins and in children, but needs more than a good natural disposition favoured by fortune if it is to reach its better maturity. It needs science and reason, i.e. 'ethic'—'the skill and manage of the charioteer'.

What do we mean by 'ought'? We mean an 'imperative obligation', a 'law of Nature', a *necessity*. In the 'Ring of Being' Universal Mind precipitates atoms which develop into organisms, and these rise to conscience of 'ministry unto God', so closing the full circle of the Ring which, in its repose, is 'Unity and Being'. Even an ouzel, the poet thinks, when it learns that instinct is not infallible, may make conscient passage from the *must* of instinct to the *ought* of ethics. The Higher (and ethical) Naturalism, therefore, need not stumble at its first beginnings; but its development is far from simple. First, 'education shapeth our moralities'. Secondly, the higher utilitarianism has its place in an adequate ethical theory of self-development, self-realization. Thirdly, ethics must unite the claims of custom with the vision of the prophet. To the former pertain 'social ethic' and much of politics, 'legalized virtue' in short. Its merits may become strangled in routine. So there is the great need for prophets and seers,

thatt white-filleted company that Aeneas found
circled around Musaeus in the Elysian fields

which

by personal affiance
with beauty hath made escape, soaring away to where
the Ring of Being closeth in the vision of God.

In the second part of his argument in this Book, the poet leaves duty (or the faithfulness of self-hood) for the alternative and complementary ethics of pleasure turning towards love of the noble. Pleasure is 'life-joy', the sense of functional harmony. The foundations of hedonism may therefore seem to be wholly secure; and yet there are evil pleasures as well as good even in highly 'spiritual' activities. Here, according to the poet, 'reason' has slipped through forming an 'abstract idea' of pleasure or of happiness. But 'life-joy', whether animal or spiritual, is something to reverence, not something to flout, and the mere existence of evil pleasures is not a denial of the wholesomeness of joy in all human activities. A certain robustness of freedom is permissible here:

life is agog; and there the Muse hath set her stage
and in humorous compact with philosophy
hideth her godlike face beneath a grinning mask.

The ascetics are always wrong.

Next Bridges returns to good disposition and right training. Unless (what is just possible) evil forces always destroy themselves in the long run, a good native disposition is essential for progress. But there should be a favourable environment. Aristotle should have put mimesis, imitation of the good, in the van of his *Ethics* as well as of his *Poetics*. By the 'preferential treatment of right action' the child will learn the habit of virtue. Music precedes intellect; and intellectual training too often frustrates 'live Imagination conscient of its joy'. Nor should there be any slur upon what may seem to be easy virtue in favourable surroundings. Virtue is never easy and although the toughness of the man who resists strong temptations is admirable, there is greater virtue, on the whole, if there is no bitter struggle.

At this point Bridges comes to the hardest part of his philosophy:

And here my thought plungeth into the darksome grove
and secret penetralia of ethic lore, wherein
I have wander'd often and long and thought to know my way
And now shall go retracing my remember'd paths
tho' no lute ever sounded there nor Muse hath sung.

How does conscient reason operate in morals? What is the intimate essence of the Socratic maxim 'Know thyself'? The boundaries between matter and mind are a 'misty march-land'. Reason takes and cannot give the secret springs of conduct. Every Essence has its own Idea, and reason can but note the fact. The one Essence whose Idea pertains to reason is Order. That and that alone is reason's peculium.

What is this mind which Socratics bid know itself? Our minds are body-based and tend towards individual conscience in the Ring of Reality. Each human intellect is a meeting place of Ideas, a different conjunction from every other mind though tending to group towards a common average. Ideas finding harbourage in sense link up in great creative traditions and, in Bach for instance, seize the magic 'from the heart-blaze of heaven to the unvisited deep'. The order which is reason's perquisite is just the harmony of essence in unison, not made by 'will' but itself making 'will'. This is the Life of Reason, as Santayana has said. It is a part of religion, 'the starved germ athirst for God'. *Quemadmodum cervus*; but the rational is subordinate to the spiritual and not its master. Here prayer has its place even if its function be simply to strengthen a man's own faith. Yet there is dignity too in the common worship of men, a dignity not to be missed even if it is also true that some contemplatives seem to need no such human fellowship:

Yet in such solitaires, pallid clerks of heaven
souls blanch'd for lack of sun-joys (as 'twould seem to hav been)
their contemplation (it may be) of very intensity
generateth ideas of higher irradiance.

Lastly, there comes the poem's envoy:

'Twas at thatt hour of beauty when the setting sun
squandereth his cloudy bed with rosy hues, to flood
his lov'd works as in turn he biddeth them Good-night.

—a day dream or sunset trance in the twilight when bats do fly
that the poet summed up in his mind with the moral:

Verily by Beauty it is that we come at Wisdom
yet not by Reason at Beauty.

and there was 'glad of his rest' since the love of God, the communion of saints and the dear and subtle ties of union and wise aspiration in the Ring of Being were ineffable even for 'the Muse herself'. Bridges would only repeat¹ his warning that Aristotle, 'the great moralist', had poisoned faith and misinterpreted the 'huge vastidity' of loving union at the heart of things by regarding God neither as loving nor as moral but altogether as perfect Reason, pure thought thinking itself. Nor did the poet flinch from technical terms in the very last lines of his philosophical poem:

God is seen as the very self-essence of love
Creator and mover of all as activ Lover of all,
self-express'd in not-self, without which no self were
In thought whereof is neither beginning nor end
nor space nor time; nor any fault nor gap therein
'twixt self and not-self, mind and body, mother and child,
'twixt lover and loved, God and man; but ONE ETERNAL
in the love of Beauty and in the self-hood of Love.

While I hope I have succeeded in sketching the principal features of this disquisition on 'ethick', I know very well that the poet intended his work upon the minuter parts of his argument to be almost if not quite as important as his work upon its broader outlines. On the other hand, I think it must be allowed that the minuter argument is often obscure, as in lines 362-71, 'where the horses in the myth, 'as he twists it', appear first to be

¹ E.g. what he said in II, 909-28.

swapped and then to be unswapped. It must also be allowed that there is a tendency to disembody into a delta of special arguments.

The fundamentals of ethics in the first division of the book are dominated by the controversy about right versus good, the obligatory versus the attractive, which had been revived in Oxford just before and after the First German War and, from 1930 onwards, led to a small freshet of English books on that subject alone. It is difficult to believe that Bridges's contribution to the controversy in 1929 is capable of withstanding criticism. If the 'must' of instinct, in an ouzel or in a child, gives place to 'ought but need not' there is a definite break, and not a gradation or a smooth transition; for 'need not' is the (modal) logical contradictory of 'must'. For the rest, Bridges's inclusion of education, and of the higher expediency, in his ethics of obligation is catholic and urbane but assembled rather than integrated. On the other hand his elaborate discussion of the contrast between the morality of custom and the morality of the seers has, in addition to its intrinsic merits, the historical interest of largely anticipating the salient antithesis of Bergson's *Les Deux Sources* published in 1932.

Whether these alleged foundations of the science of ethics are or are not strongly supported by the metaphysical introduction, especially in lines 91-130, is an unanswerable question, because the metaphysics, apart from its general insistence upon gradation, is stated too briefly for interrogation. Such lines as

The Ring in its repose is Unity and Being
Causation and Existence are the motion thereof

carry us back to Proclus, and Scotus Erigena, and Cusa and their kindred, but with the barest affirmation, not with an invitation to discussion.

In the second division of this fourth book the poet's criticism of hedonism, namely that it is based on an abstract idea, is not impressive. All the Platonic Ideas and Essences that he later accepts are equally abstract. There was no need for him to say more under this head than that agreeable sensation is a usual but

not an invariable mark of harmonious functioning, and is never the whole of such functioning. These plain facts are sufficient to explain his nervousness concerning the ascetics and at the same time his determination to convict them of exaggeration.

The main argument of the book, emphatically declared to be so, is the examination of the Socratic maxim *Nosce teipsum*. If that maxim is taken to mean, as it did mean in a long philosophical tradition, that the self is a thing apart, self-investigating, self-revealed to merely rational self-consciousness, the Higher Naturalism would be denied and the Ring of Being would be broken at least once, namely where self and not-self part. Therefore it was necessary for Bridges to challenge the maxim in some of its senses while retaining others. Body and mind, inconscient and conscient, sense and reason are not ultimately separable. They are all caught up in the *nisus* of 'emergent evolution' (l. 1260) and are part of the movement of that which does not move and is super-spatial and super-temporal 'Unity and Being'.

Whether such a philosophy of Being and of Becoming is itself credible is not solicitously argued. It is the poet's faith, his good faith in the soundness of what he had written. He did, however, commit himself to close agreement with the Platonic Naturalism of Mr Santayana as expounded in his *Life of Reason*. This general agreement was of long standing. In a letter of October 1901, Bridges had written of Santayana: 'I do not think that I have ever met with anything so much like my own notions as his general position. I always seem to see man as the centre of concentric spheres, the nearest to him being the "circle" of common sense and matter-of-fact, beyond this the circle of science and intellect, & beyond that, stretching out to infinity, the realm of imagination, which imagination, if it be present radiates from the center, and is related to everything, at least *if it be present* at all.'¹

Here I shall make an end. There is grandeur in the philosophy of the *Testament*, and an approach to greatness in much of its poetry. There may be grounds for still higher praise.

¹ *Correspondence of Robert Bridges and Henry Bradley*, p. 5.

